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# AROUND THE GOLDEN DEEP



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Reviews

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# AROUND THE GOLDEN DEEP.

# AROUND THE GOLDEN DEI

## A ROMANCE OF THE SIERRAS.

BY

A. P. REEDER.

Mary Bloeom Lindley

Love rules the whole wide world; though lone and far
Men thread the piney wastes or scale the bare
And sharp Sierra summits, like the star
Of evening, bright and pure, they find him there.

SAN FRANCISCO:
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BOSTON: CUPPLES AND HURD.
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# AROUND THE GOLDEN DEEP.

## CHAPTER I.

### A STRANGER IN TOWN.

> Ye sentinels of sleep, it is in vain ye keep
> Your drowsy watch before the Ivory Gate,
> Though closed the portal seems, the airy feet of dreams
> Ye cannot thus in walls incarcerate.
>
> LONGFELLOW.

SCHOOL was out at the little red school-house, and the wild-voiced children went noisily down the village street, stopping here and there to note the new sights about town since their confinement in school, or to chat in little groups before separating to go home. But the neat little school-mistress sat at her desk with her hands folded, just as she did when the last careless footstep sounded down the stairs, motionless still, and thinking, with a sad, dreamy look in her eyes. Home! what would it be to her to go home! — to sit cosily again with Aunt Robinson and the girls, and John too; to see the old house with its rough, weather-stained walls, its one bright patch of white-wash gleaming through the green trees, — she wondered if even that were there yet; and then the cows, and the lazy old horses, Tip the dog, and even that

pretty nest of warm, helpless little kittens, which must have developed into a host of great ungainly cats since she left home five years ago. The tears started to her eyes as she thought of it, — up among the hills green with the mantle of spring, and in the pine groves where the breezes made weird songs among the swaying plumes; where the streams were clear and deep and cold, rushing from their snow fountains down dark rocky channels to the rivers; and where the heavy, bright-painted stages, and the dusty, slow mule-teams made daily trips up and down the red winding roads, bringing news and a breath of excitement with each arrival. Now vacation was coming, and there was still work for her to do; but she felt a longing to see the old home and the familiar faces again. She almost decided to go, anyway, — to leave her busy round of cares for just one little season of relaxation; to be home and free once more, and forget all about the dark, noisy world shut away by her own high hills, and the fair blue skies bending tenderly around, as if to keep out all jar and discord, and hold within the wild sweet solitude and the old primeval glory of the mountains.

She rose excitedly; the dingy walls had changed to flower-starred slopes, the wind whistling at the windows to trilling lark-songs, and even the white misty cobwebs up around the ceiling to flecks of snowy cloud in a warm bright sky. The breath of the pines was in the air, and the strange inspiration of the old home life all around her, as she walked dreamily out, mechanically locked the door, and wended her way down the shady streets of the village.

Coming up through the locust-trees, on a slow jog, was an odd little two-wheeled cart, shiny and black, and a smart-looking, cream-white horse that felt the importance of its energetic appearance, and so could afford to step high if not far, thus making little progress over the ground. A gentleman lounging on the high, wide seat seemed to be not half so much the proprietor of the rig as the sharp-looking, lazy horse; for he sat at ease, gazing meditatively out on one side, with the lines slack in his left hand, the other resting on a huge, long whip that looked like a fishing-rod, and was always getting into trouble with the trees bending over the road. He was stout, with a florid face and gray hair, and wore long yellow gauntlets and a closely buttoned coat. Drawing nearer, he caught sight of the school-mistress, and as he pulled up the reins, the white horse came to a dead halt. His countenance fairly beamed, and a good-natured smile broadened out almost into a laugh.

"Well, well, — hello!" he said. "Long way from home, Nettie; did n't expect to see *you* here. Jump in and take a spin now. Jump right in here, — plenty of room, — and let me see you, — ah-h!" He had a deep, slow voice, hesitating and half breathless, and finished with a long-drawn "ah-h!" as if he meant to say more but decided not to, and turned his hesitation into a vocal clearing of his throat. He sat for a moment and stared at her, standing wonder-struck and large-eyed under the trees; then a confused expression gradually neutralized the smile and his flushed face grew redder, he gave the reins a spasmodic jerk, said hurriedly, "Beg pardon, — pardon, ma'am; I'm mis-

taken," and was off down the road, urging the high-stepping horse into a faster trot, the fish-rod whip sailing majestically through the air, and the flush on his face extending even around to the back of his neck. The school-mistress turned to look after him, and burst into a little peal of laughter. It had all happened in a moment, — the picture of the stout man riding up in the cart, the sudden stop, his face illumined with pleasure, the blank stare, and the sudden departure, when the slow horse affected to be in very much of a hurry, though in reality taking her time. She watched till a bend in the road showed the side view of the cart and horse, winding in and out, and the last glimpse she caught was of the yellow gauntlets gleaming rich and bright through the green foliage of the locusts.

Farewell now, charmed visions of home and hills, and the dreamy atmosphere of long ago! It was in vain she sought to revive her pleasant reverie; the quaint scene she had just passed through rose up irresistibly before her, and would not be banished.

All the way home she thought of it, and in the evening when she sat down to write to Aunt Robinson and the girls, to tell them how she had been hoping for a quiet rest with them during the long, hot vacation, she could not resist putting in a brief account of the affair, and excused it by saying she supposed he was thinking, like herself, of some one far away. Better had she left it out; for writing of it only fastened it more firmly in her mind, and all night long, instead of dreaming of incorrigible youth planning mischief and making a noise, she saw lazy white horses hitched to high-wheeled gigs, and yellow gloves, appearing by

dozens, — weaving and spinning around, this way and that, among the locust groves; and they all came up to her and stopped, and sometimes the stout man laughed and threw a kiss to her; and sometimes he was thinking deeply, and only saw her just before he passed, and then would stop and smile faintly; and yet again he seemed in a great hurry, but was sadly delayed by his big whip getting caught in all the tree branches, and when opposite her under the tall tree he had to stop short, so she helped him by pushing the boughs aside with her parasol; until finally he came up with brighter gloves, and looked handsome and young and spirited, and she climbed into the gig and rode away; and after that she saw herself in all the gigs, and they all had much brighter wheels, and rolled a great deal faster, and they never stopped any more, but kept right on, winding here and there among the trees that suddenly burst forth into creamy showers of blossoms, and hung down long fragrant garlands into the path, forming an avenue walled and canopied with swinging festoons of odorous flowers through which the golden sunshine sifted in glinting floods of light.

Next day she forgot it, almost, busied with the well-worn pages of her books, and the chattering little flock of children gathered for her care and instruction; so that when the time came to go home, she only gave it a fleeting thought as she passed under the great tree where the scene had transpired. But when she reached the house where she lived, — great sight of sights! — it stood there, the gig of yesterday, the gig of her dreams, and the plump, bright-eyed horse hitched to the post in front of the gate. She paused and looked at it, al-

most afraid to enter, while her whole existence seemed shaped into one great interrogation point asking the meaning of this strange vehicle haunting her by day and night; but presently she caught sight of the gentleman who had ridden it, standing among the trees that grew in front of the house. He had been walking listlessly back and forth, the yellow-gloved hands folded behind him, and absorbed in deep thought, as he was the day before when she first saw him. As she came through the gate he advanced to meet her, and said politely, "Miss Lois Warren, I believe?" at the same time presenting his card, which read, "Franklyn Knapp, M. D."

"I called to see you to-day," he said, "and Mrs. Mills informing me that you were still at school, I invited myself out into the garden to wait for you, finding it much cooler and pleasanter than the house."

"O, certainly," she replied; "will you take a seat here under the trees?"

His preoccupied manner had changed to one somewhat more nervous and excited, and he sat down, pulling off his gauntlets and smoothing them out carefully on his knee.

"I understand, Miss Warren, that you are the teacher of the school of our village, — a pleasant vocation; and I, perhaps, will be the doctor, — that is, if all things come out agreeably. I presume you all know my brother, Dr. Melville Knapp, who has practised here for twenty years or thereabout, is going away, — to the East, in fact, — circumstances making it necessary; and I have been appointed to his place in the hospital of our neighboring town, and his successor in

practice generally, perchance. I am quite delighted with this little place, — its pleasant homes and locust-lined streets, — and I find, so far, the people are not behind the town in agreeableness. They have received me very warmly, and have promised co-operation in all my plans. But I have been told to apply to you for a little assistance, — ah-h! " — growing more flushed and slightly agitated, — " since you are recommended as a young lady always interested in schemes for the public benefit, or willing to help a good cause; and knowing that a young person has more time, if not always the inclination, to devote outside of home, I thought it possible you would assist me, — ah-h! "

" Most willingly," Lois replied, heartily, " if it lies in my power."

" O, yes, I guess so, — I think so," said the Doctor; " almost any lady could do what I wish done. It is for the benefit of my patients in the hospital. I maintain, Miss Warren, that an unhappy state of the mind can and often does produce illness. Still more so, in protracted or chronic cases of sickness, the mind becomes almost diseased from brooding over physical suffering; consequently the spirits are depressed, the action of the heart weakened, the circulation of the blood lessened, and then of course the whole system injured; and not the least of the evils, in an impaired physical condition, is this deranged action of the mind, because an unhealthy brain acting through the sympathetic system of nerves, does double damage to the poor, weak body. But catch the spark of interest that is not absorbed in the miseries of illness, and cultivate without wearying it, give it a change, — a variety, — and

we have toned the mind and rested the body more than half a dozen prescriptions could do. And day by day, as the hour comes for a little change from the long, wearing uneasiness of lying and aimlessly waiting from sleepless night to agonizing day, the pleasure of anticipation helps our good labor, and relieves the monotony quite as well as what we do to interest the mind. Nature is man's best physician. She herself must build up and make things strong and secure again. It is only when active poisons are at work that drugs do good, to counteract and neutralize the damaging cause. And when evil effects result from perverted functions, the physician's work lies in doing something to restrain their action; or in an accident, to soothe and ease pain, and assist nature somewhat, this way and that, remove foreign substances, sew up wounds, place fractured bones in position, and the like; but that is as nothing compared with what nature herself must do. It is as if the whole machinery of life were reversed,—its wheels turned backward; and we can sometimes stop their false movement and set them straight, but we never can make them work in the right direction again: that is nature's duty,—nature's work; and when she is helpless to aid us, when she is powerless and worn out, the machinery that cannot move forward stops, and we call it death. And so if we are not able to prevent damage done by body to mind, we must strive to hinder the mind from retaliating upon the poor, irresponsible body, by doing a like wrong in return. That is helping nature, you see, in her perfect action; for a strong body strengthens the brain, and a well-balanced, active, right-working brain is about the only thing that can keep the

I can be sure of that.

"And now, for your services, which will of course take up some of your leisure time, I will make you any compensation you ask; for your assistance will be indispensable."

While he was speaking, the pleasant face of the little school-mistress had lighted up with enthusiasm. She was a helpful, busy girl, and in her natural sphere when carrying out some plan of this nature, so she said quickly, —

"Compensation, — certainly *not*, sir. The work itself would be such a pleasure I could ask no other reward. I enter into it with the heartiest approval. Let me commence soon, too, if you will; I am even anxious to begin."

"Good!" said the Doctor, — "very good. You are just the best young lady I could find, for you are both sympathetic and energetic, — two very fine qualities, — very helpful qualities. Indeed, I was told," — growing red again, and drawing on his gloves hurriedly, — "it was mentioned that you would be more interested in such a scheme than any other person; because inclination is a necessary thing, Miss Warren, — an invaluable thing, — ah-h! And about the compensation, we must consider it later if you will not hear of it now. I will call the day after to-morrow for your first contribution to my patients, which I feel assured will be a first-quality one, — a well-selected one. I visit the hospital at least three times a week, and if you will prepare something for each regular trip, I should like it well. I am very happy to have found you, Miss Warren, — to have met you," he said, rising and bowing; "it is a most fortunate thing for me as well as for my patients, I am

sure; so allow me to offer my most sincere thanks. Good day."

Then he was off down the garden path, hastily untying his horse, and preparing for departure, — all of which took up a great deal of time, notwithstanding his apparent hurry; and as he rode away, he looked around and caught a glimpse of Lois under the trees, which caused him to smile good-naturedly, and raise his hat with an air of great deference. Vanishing down the road she saw the shiny gig and its cream-white horse raising the dust in little clouds, as if moving rapidly, but it was in sight for a long while, and so she had ample time to take another good view of it from her seat in the garden.

This little school-mistress was not of an uncommon stamp, in many particulars; she was quick and lively, ambitious and fond of work, pleasant to others, and cheerful herself; but she possessed one rare virtue, — a warm, generous heart, and power to execute its dictates. Left an orphan, she had been adopted when quite young by a family named Robinson, and had grown up strong and sweet-tempered and natural, among the quiet hills; and being of a studious disposition, she had remained at school longer than the other children of the family, and so became a teacher. It was not a lack of love for her home and the early scenes of her life that made her thus aspire to leave them, but rather a desire for a greater independence, and a broader field of action; her surplus strength created a desire to use it, and so she was ambitious for herself and for all those around her. She had a neat, charming way of doing little favors, just at the right time and in the

quickest and best mode, which made friends for her; yet she was so gentle and sunny, lacking showy sparkle and personal brilliancy, that she excited little envy by the good-will she had won. Every one liked her: and why should they not? — when she was agreeable and helpful and kind, always planning and doing, and using every moment.

Let us skip one period in the life of the school-mistress; it was a happy, joyous time, that would surely have brought out all her native charity and usefulness; but when she lost the crowning happiness, and a great sorrow entered into her life, her disappointment no less surely called them out in plans and work for others. She was not a girl to give up to mourning and sadness; she buried her love, — the one true, earnest love that she had known, — and took up the busy thread of work cheerfully and steadfastly. Friends looked on and sympathized, and after a while forgot it, thinking she too had forgotten; though deep down in her heart she held it sacred and unchangeable.

No wonder, then, that Lois Warren took a deep interest in the Doctor's scheme. It was the work to which she had dedicated her life, — a life not burdened by a living woe, but one even happy in its subdued joys, and unhindered in its generous outpourings of kindness.

She sat thinking of it, and of the Doctor too, under the trees where he had talked with her, and presently a wild freak of imagination pictured her dream over again, in thousands of tiny gigs and horses climbing up a glossy grape-vine near her; she could even see the yellow gloves and the high wheels; and some of

the gigs got into difficulties passing over the leaves, and many fell partly down the vine and had to work their way up again; and the little white horses were lazy, just like the big white one the Doctor had, and so they moved very slowly, and often got tangled together. But finally one gig, which looked smaller than the rest, started up a leaf and made itself conspicuous by having an immense whip twice as long as the horse itself, and reminded her of an ant carrying a long straw. It had an uncomfortable time, and was stopped on several occasions, until at last the great whip struck a tendril just above it, the horse lost its balance, and the whole thing fell to the ground, making a loud rustle in the grass. Lois started and opened her eyes, feeling as if she had been far away, while near her she caught sight of little Jimmie Mills creeping through the grass and throwing a marble toward her.

"Nonsense!" she said to herself as she rose and brushed the leaves from her dress. "Absurdity the second! What do I mean by allowing that everlasting cart to make such an impression on busy, matter-of-fact me? Begone, visions! I wonder how long I've been here wasting time, — worse than wasting it," — emphatically, — "when work awaits me."

"Please, Miss Warren," said Jimmie, coming toward her, "ma sent me to call you in to dinner."

"Dinner, Jimmie! — is it time for that?"

"Yes, of course. Ma thought you stayed out here awful long with that feller what comes in the gig. It's plumb dinner-time now."

"I *must* have been asleep," thought Lois. "And oh!

the awful vehicle haunting me right here in broad daylight! I'll not think of it any more; I'll not even *look* at it again," she said, with prompt decision, and turned to go into the house; but her attention was arrested by a dull, buzzing sound out in the road, and Jimmie saying very loudly, "O, just look there, Miss Warren." She looked, and with one despairing struggle renounced her resolution; for just out beyond the garden fence she saw the Doctor passing, smiling and taking off his hat again to her; he was returning from a ride in the country, whither he had gone when she watched him disappear from sight, and now was driving slowly homeward, looking out on one side, just as he was doing when she first saw him in his horrible, dream-haunting, never-to-be-forgotten gig.

## CHAPTER II.

### A STAGE ROAD IN THE SIERRAS.

They journeyed o'er a piney mountain waste,
And through the vales of deep, luxuriant grass,
And reached a river's tides, that purl and haste
Through walls of rock with gold veins interlaced,
And down the rugged gorges foaming pass.

"Ah, the mountains of snow!"—and the speaker leaned out of the window of the rumbling stage to catch a fuller view, through the piney sweeps of hills broken by a curving river, of the snow chain, white and pure and cool, shining serrated and clear against the pale rose setting of the eastern sky. His face lighted up with a smile of inspiration, and his grave mood gave way to a spirit of enthusiasm while he looked; then turning to his companion he said, more pleasantly than he had yet spoken in all the course of their rough journey, "Come, look through the mountain pass at the glorious glimpse of Paradise opening before us." The lady seated beside him looked up with a supercilious little smile, and leaned forward to gaze out also at this first surprising glimpse of the Sierras; but her attention was more closely riveted upon her companion, whom she watched constantly, to read, if she could, his inmost soul. She was of an interesting and peculiar type, — a blending of the indolent and the cat-like creature, ever on the watch, even in her most dreamy moments. Tall and slender, and willowy of

motion, there was still a charming roundness figure, suggestive of lily stocks; her eyes were gray, her hair bright auburn, wound artistically a well-formed head, her features regular, but no tiful, and her skin pure white. Sometimes, wh long dark lashes swept her cheek, and her face w expression of calm repose, on a closer observan could detect a sly, quick glance upward from b those silken fringes, and a slight change of expr not the most ethereal that could be imagined. she sat demurely looking out upon the landsca bright glow of the departing day casting a ra over her fair face, framed by her dark mournir thrown backward, and over her neat black dre quickly now and then she stole a glance at th beside her, who was too enrapt with the wild be the mountains to take note of aught else around, to call others to enjoy it also. Finally she leaned back and made his face her only study.

The stage had reached the top of a long grade, the hills below fell abruptly in unbroken lines soft belts of shining white sand along the river n while an opening through the solid rock-walls s like the everlasting gates of the hills thrown o reveal, beyond the long stretches of mountain miles and miles of a storm-tossed sea of dark fragrant pine reaching upward to where the snow pierced the soft bending sky with a hundred gl summits. It was spring. The full glory of beauty lay over the hills in embroideries of g azure, the scarlet tongues of the laurel flam from ferny bank and jutting crag, and the

masses of chaparral breathed out a strange, drowsy perfume from their creamy snow-fall of blossoms. Twilight was coming. Only here and there on the distant summits the dark fir points caught a ray of red sunlight streaming through the hills, and down in the shadowy gulches the crickets set up a weird little chirp that echoed shrilly along the rocky banks till lost in the dull, deep roar of the river.

At last, when a bend of the road brought them into a tunnel-like hollow, the high walls of which shut out, with fragrant, cool masses of madroño and manzanita, and dewy, climbing vines, the glorious panorama of snow, the man sank back as if reluctant to leave its sublime beauties for the monotonies of the journey, and still longed to keep the memory of it while yet its wild grandeur held a spell over him; but he caught sight of the lady's steady glance, and instantly a change passed across his features,—a look of disappointment that she had not enjoyed the charm of his bright mountain picture, and of surprise that she should thus be reading his face in an unguarded moment; so he quietly gave vent to only one little word, "Ah!" and relapsed into silence. She started slightly, and colored with a faint flush, so delicate that it could almost be mistaken for a reflection of the rose-tinted east; but these were the only signs she gave of discomfiture at being caught without her mask; and composing herself by drawing her wrap more closely about her, she looked up to him calmly, and said, "Well?"

"You do not enjoy wild scenery, Miss Nellie," he replied. "I think the view we have just passed superbly grand, but I noticed you did not care to look. If I

should make this journey a hundred times a year I would cheerfully bear all the fatigues of the travel with the hope of that scene before me."

Now was her chance, a good one for this sly, scheming girl, to excuse herself with a winning card. So with a gentle little smile she returned sweetly, "You see the sublimity without, while I admire more the sublimity within."

"Thank you," he said, and looked down upon her with a quiet, half-amused expression, and yet for a face so kindly it became dangerously near being one of pity and disdain. She saw her mistake; the awkwardness of the moment had robbed her manner and words of the artistic fitness she could so easily summon to her aid, and she knew that her slight discomposure a moment before when he caught her in her study had done the mischief. Though it had troubled her but slightly at the time, it now threatened a greater evil; for it had so overthrown her self-control that she had made herself almost ridiculous with an overdrawn and ineffective answer. His "Thank you," and his half-pitying look, disturbed her greatly, and she resolved to try again, — to do or say something, — anything so long as she acted out the role she meant to play, and fortified the position she had assumed. She looked grieved, and said in a subdued tone, as if he had made light of her most earnest feelings, "You do me injustice to laugh at me, because I have unfortunately said something that sounded out of place. I felt what I said, though I did not say it at all elegantly. What I really meant to say is this: To you who have nothing better, it is beau-

ul; but I, who love mountains maybe as well as you,

can forego the pleasure that may be mine at any time when I make this journey, for one that is far better to me, and which may never be mine again,—the look of undisguised admiration on your face, Edward; you are so grave and reserved to me that I seldom see you in your natural moods, though I would be only too happy if I could inspire you with only one half of the confidence you awaken in me. But I have always vainly tried to impress you with what I really do feel. Come, let us be friends,—good friends, I mean"; and she held out her hand in such a graceful way, with a look so winning, that her words did not sound ill-timed or bold, but seemed to reveal a glimpse of a soul as innocent and lovely as a child's. It had the desired effect. Edward Dennett's indifferent expression melted away into one of pleasure, and he turned and gave his hand in a hearty, cordial way that seemed almost a revelation to this girl, so accustomed to win and deceive that she could play with the dearest feelings of earnest hearts without even a flutter in her own. But now a new thrill came over her, a faint realization of what it is to be true and noble, and it brought a real joy, with a vague, undefined resolve to deserve, at least in this one instance, the kind friendship she had at length succeeded in calling out.

"Friends!—of course; and good friends we will be, too, Miss Nellie, if you care. Forgive me if I misunderstood you. It was careless of me not to have seen your seriousness at first, but I thought you spoke rather lightly." This was too much for the feline-natured girl. She bent her head and managed to coax out a tear, which rolled down her round white cheek and fell

upon her hand. She meant to be good, to be true; but what matter if she did little things like this for effect, even if she did not wholly feel them? He saw it, and his conscience smote him for his harsh judgment. Yet he was not naturally hard-tempered, nor accustomed to overlook the good gifts of those around him. Even a glance at his face would give an insight into his character,—so gentle, so earnest, so kind, it seemed. He was of the Saxon type, large and fair, broad-shouldered, and manly in form. Light curling hair and a handsome mustache added greatly to his finely cut, expressive features, and dark, searching eyes of blue looked frankly and openly upon those around him, as if his own character were so steadfast and upright that he could afford to open these windows of the soul to the gaze of all the world.

They were travelling to a mountain camp situated high up in the forest-covered foothills of California, where a successful mine had called forth an army of toilers to unearth the treasures of the soil. Excitement had run high at the news of the first rich pockets, and a thriving little camp had sprung up like magic. A company formed of several capitalists had placed a valuable plant upon the mine, and pushed operations steadily forward until they had begun to realize something in return for their expenditure. They had sent a superintendent to the place, who in turn was to appoint a manager, and the choice had fallen upon Edward Dennett, as the best of the enterprising actors who had first taken part in the proceedings. Although young, he was remarkably quick and clear-headed, understood machinery, and was by far the best man

for the place, though old miners stood by with years of experience in the work. At last the cunning workings had proved a sufficient guide, and with careful mining and more considered work, it soon became necessary to engage a carpenter and assistant to undertake further operations, and Edward Jermaine sent word to the city on this occasion, and came to superintend a fresh force of miners.

His stay there had been short, but long enough for him to note the wonderful change in Rose Bissett, and her danger. They had been sufficiently close to him in past years, so that a moment's glance of recognition had enlightened him as to the cause, as worldly gains; although designating Basil Bissett, saw as to her heart's ideal — even the prospect of happiness as to future, — and she discerned that he was a far nobler than most young men who entered as lovers to her. In fact, she was in love with him, as far as her vanity and desire for power and mastery allowed her to be in love with anybody. For even in those childhood days her heart was ever moved to do a generous, kindly act toward any of her companions, it was for his sake or inspired by him. Yet this love, more fancy at first, had slowly grown, until, when the lapsing years had given her the full sense of womanhood, and she had long been separated from her early love, she still said it in a sort of pretence, as the only true feeling her heart had ever felt. And finally, it was the memory of a ruling motive in her life, though into every action there was the promptings and wishes of her own will. Now, she felt sure of it in a different, indefinable way for want of a stronger feeling.

But when they met and she saw Edward Dennett, manly and strong and noble, a grand fulfilment of the promise of his early youth, her love, her ambition for power, her vanity, knew no bounds. Anything — everything — now for this one end. But she had wholly failed to impress him, — how deeply it stung her! — and she knew that he would never seek her except for the sake of old friendship, so she resolved to put herself in his way. His conversation of the camp, its mines, its forests, its mountains, and his mention of their fine new hotel, already visited by tourists, suggested an idea. Notwithstanding her mother's indifference, Nellie resolved to organize a little party of her friends to spend their summer among the mountains, in the clear, bracing air.

It is not always easy to persuade friends to undertake something wholly untried when an opportunity for certain enjoyment that has never failed remains open, so she was not altogether successful. But at last she suggested it to Mabel Willis, a lovely, bright-spirited girl; and her descriptions of the fine, rare scenery and the new delightful mode of life were so fascinating, that immediately she had one firm adherent to the plan. Mabel lived with her aunt, a childless widow, prim and old-fashioned, and staid in her ideas, a veritable terror to all young people's enjoyments; so that though Mabel had had the strictest training and the highest principles instilled into her mind, she yet had seen very few of the merry joy-days of life's spring-time. She was a gentle, affectionate girl, bright and happy-tempered, true and generous, and so her life had not been deprived of its best and fullest development.

She was rapturously fond of nature, and some of the brightest pictures of her remembrance were of quiet, dreamy hours spent on the rocky beach of some little inlet, whither she and her aunt had gone to spend an out-door day, watching the long plane of blue-green water, with its snowy flutes and frills of foam, moving with a slow, swaying motion toward the shore, to break into diamond-covered, angry little breakers on the beach; or of the evening star in a cold white sky, shining just above the line where the limitless ocean of waters seemed to frown dark and treacherous along the horizon's rim; or still again in the flying train where they moved along some steep, vine-tangled hillside, while far below flowed the bright thread of a deep, noisy stream, sending its clear splash and steady roar up through the thick line of trees that bordered its banks, and through the gorges, till its dull thunderings echoed for miles along its course. What a vision rose before her of the pine belt in the mountains, sweeping miles and miles along next the pearly shafts of snow! She must go. Aunt Willis was generally as firm as adamant; but the proposition seemed to take her fancy somewhat this time, for Mabel was twenty now, and it was high time her clamoring friends were appeased in their desire to take her for a summer at some fashionable resort. Indeed, this was an excellent and sure escape; so though outwardly reluctant, Aunt Willis privately received the idea with rejoicing, and resolved to go. Nellie Minton was anxious to start. Early spring was marvellously beautiful in the mountains, she said. The summer might be too warm for comfort, and then they might not be so pleased as they antici-

pated, so they would not have wasted all their summering there,—this in advance, for fear she might wish to change her tactics. Besides, she thought of the choice opportunity she would have to make the journey with Edward Dennett, and to do what she could to further her plans. But she dreaded in secret Mabel's pretty face and girlish, innocent manner, lest they should eclipse her. Then she thought of a way out of it,—to send word to her friends that they would start the day after the one which Edward Dennett had set for the trip, and thus delay them slightly, while she would be ready, and make it appear impossible to turn back.

It all happened just as she had hoped, so she wrote a note to Mrs. Willis, regretting deeply the unfortunate occurrence, but saying that she would try not to be very lonesome on the journey, and would expect them the day after her arrival, when she would have all things in readiness for them, so that they would not be greatly inconvenienced, taking things altogether. She had taken a bold step, but it troubled her little; and so she set out in the best of moods.

But she was disappointed. In vain were all her arts, her merry little ways, her charming, helpless indolence, —they failed even to interest her companion. He was polite and thoughtful for her comfort, and that was all.

The daring attempt she had made, when she offered her friendship to him so appealingly, was a last resort. And now she glittered forth brilliantly, and the tear she had shed was really only an extra sparkle of her joyous spirits.

"I am so glad—oh, so glad!—you have promised —that — Edward," — hesitatingly. "Because we

should be the best of friends, should we not, when we have known each other so long? There are no friends like the old friends, you know,—to me at least. And then this summer we shall see each other often, too. And I shall want a friend to confide in, and help me out of my naughty little tricks, when I need one. Ah, Mr. Dennett! you are always so kind, I 'm sure even your presence will be a protection to me"; and she finished with a little sigh.

"You may feel assured that I shall make your visit as pleasant to you and your friends as it is possible for me to do," he replied. "But where the world is beautiful, and care is absent, then pleasure is sure to come in the mere act of living."

"O no, not always. The world is often beautiful when our lives have lost every ray of sunshine."

"But I said when *care* is absent, Miss Nellie, as it should be with you."

"Alas! I am always caring for something that is far above me"; then quickly, for fear of being misunderstood, "I mean far removed from my reach, as I thought your friendship was a moment ago, Mr. Dennett; and so you see I am not always happy amid beautiful surroundings, even though as lovely as your snowy picture."

By this time they had reached the ferry. The stage stopped suddenly, and the ferry-man called to the passengers to get out. There was only one other, the assayer, who had a seat outside with the driver. They stood in a little group while the boat slowly drifted from one shore to the other, Nellie standing near Edward Dennett, and the stranger a little aside from the rest, leaning over the rail and looking into the water.

He had scarcely seen them yet during their journey, keeping himself apart to smoke and enjoy the trip unmolested, and seemed to feel very little curiosity about his fellow-travellers. On reaching the farther shore a sudden lurch of the boat nearly threw them off their feet, Nellie just escaping a fall by the stranger swiftly springing forward and catching her gallantly in his arms. Thinking it Edward who had caught her, and true to her instincts, she gave herself up to his protecting clasp for a moment longer than was necessary, and looked up into his eyes. The man started. "As I live! Nellie Minton!" he said rather excitedly, and glanced at Edward.

She recovered herself instantly, stood up in pert fashion, and replied, "To be sure. And you are George Brooklyn, as *I* live!"

He did not feel exactly comfortable nor pleased with her presence, yet to make himself agreeable he asked, "And what are you doing up here, Miss Minton, crossing a ferry in the twilight far from the haunts of civilization, and on the direct road to the mines?"

"The same thing that you are doing, I presume," she answered,—"going there, of course."

"Well, by Jove! that 's a surprise. I scarcely looked at you before, reserving to myself that pleasure when I arrived at my destination, where I know pleasant things will be scarce. How long do you stay?" He had a neat way of excusing himself for indifference and inattention; he was seldom guilty of open impoliteness.

"That depends, of course, on my friends who are coming to-morrow. They were delayed, and I had to come with my friend here, Mr. Dennett,"—herself feel-

ing not the most comfortable that he had caught her travelling alone with Mr. Dennett, when she would much rather he had not. He noticed it instantly, and resolved to use it.

They were now on the other side. The driver was preparing the lights and watering the horses, and Edward busied himself inside the stage getting out their wraps and robes to keep off the chill of the evening air, so George Brooklyn took advantage of his absence for a word with Nellie. "Come and look at this branch of snow-plant sailing down the river," he called from the water's edge, and she could do nothing else but join him.

"Nellie," he said quickly, when she reached his side, "will you do me a little favor?"

"Certainly, a *little* one."

"Well, then, a moderately sized one; we have always been on pretty good terms, have we not? And I know you quite as well as you know me."

"Yes, but suppose you do? I am perfectly willing. I take good care usually, Mr. Brooklyn, and I'm seldom caught, even if there might be a chance, once in a great while, to expose some of my naughty little designs or fibs, — ha! ha!"

"Yes, you are sharp. It beats the old fellow himself the way you crawl out sometimes. But time is short, and I will tell you now what I meant to say. It is this: let us not refer a great deal, during our meetings in the future, to our past associations, or the friends of long ago. What say you?"

"That 's a beautiful thing to ask me to promise, — and what for, pray?"

"Do you need to ask?"

"O no; but I thought I would, to kill time. However, my word for this much: unless you conduct yourself to offend me, I am on your side and you on mine, everlasting, — or no, during our stay, I mean. Not a word that the whole world might not hear."

"Thank you."

She had an advantage, but she also recognized the slight power he had, so she was willing to make a compromise so long as she had nothing to gain by not making it, and her promise was one easily broken also.

"Her word to the deuce, where it came from," he muttered, as she walked away. "I'm tied up now with that deceitful minx to please for the sake of a mere existence. Confound it all."

"All aboard," rang out clear above the roar of the waters, and the passengers took their places for the long ride up a rocky grade that wound over the hills broken by the wearing river. The lights shone out dim and yellow in the late twilight, the driver's whip cracked, and away they went up the winding road. Nellie, inside with Mr. Dennett, settled down cosily by him, and conversed pleasantly, finally drifting into one of her charming little humorous stories for his amusement; while he exerted himself to make her comfortable by tucking a wrap snugly about her, and placing a cushion for her to lean against.

Night deepened, and hid the hills in a mystery of darkness, the golden sickle of the new moon gleamed out from the west, and the firs hanging close over the road brushed their blunt needles against the stage in noisy little showers of sound; while without, the driver talked and shouted to his horses, and George Brooklyn smoked away his uneasiness and wrath.

## CHAPTER III.

### A STOP AT ROBINSON'S.

**Her eye had a glow like the sun of her clime,**
**Which waked every feeling at once into flower.**
MOORE.

"ST-A-GE!" long and loud the cry arose, and the watcher, having done his duty, started back toward the house from his lookout on the brow of the hill, while the waiting hostler led out his six shining horses, ready harnessed, and the cook in the kitchen, who also heard the call, began dishing up the soup and pease, and hurrying about here and there to have all things in readiness. Up through the late dim twilight shone two twinkling lights, and at length a dull, rumbling noise came nearer and nearer, until at last the dark forms of the horses rose to view, and the stage itself showed distinctly against the white glow over the horizon, coming closer and sounding louder; and then with a rush, and a great deal of creaking and hissing of brakes, the ponderous conveyance rolled up and stopped. "Robinson's," announced the driver; "half-past seven now; we start in thirty minutes"; and then went off to get a match of the hostler, with which to light his pipe.

"Three," reported the dining-room girl to the disgusted cook, returning from her place by a front window, where she could see the passengers alight; and consequently several plates of soup were emptied back into the kettle, and there was much less haste in the

big hot kitchen. "Splendid business we 're doing these days," said the cook, sarcastically, who took more interest than people in her position usually do, because she was one of the daughters of the family who kept the house.

"Only three, did you say, Lill? Are you sure? There might have been two or three more inside who did n't get out."

"Only three, I said," replied Lill. "I would have seen them if there 'd been more, — two gentlemen and one lady."

"And the lady and one of the gentlemen husband and wife, of course; and likely as not they won't eat, but will wait till they get up to the Royal Regina," said Lettie, the cook.

"No, I say not. For one gentleman who rode outside does n't say much to the rest, and the other man with the lady is Ned Dennett of the Lucky Streak. They 're coming in, but the other fellow said he was dizzy, and thought he 'd walk up and down the porch to feel better."

"Why, tell John to invite him in, and we 'll do something for him, Lill. You can have Milcie give him a dose of the bitters to tone him up. Likely he 's got cold riding so far in the chill night breeze," directed Lettie; and Lill flew away to tell John.

"Thanks," said George Brooklyn on receiving the invitation; "I shall be glad of the opportunity, for I am rather tired"; and he followed John into the large square parlor, where a knot of pine blazing in the fireplace warmed the air, and a lounge with a soft pillow upon it looked very comfortable and inviting. Milcie,

[illegible] blue and yellow and purple lights.

"Going up to the Lucky Strike?" [illegible] asked.

"Yes."

"Big diggings nowadays, we hear. [illegible] have word, the stage is chartered for [illegible] miners going up, though they've got a powerful [illegible] on now. Every one up here is glad of it, just the same it makes business, and travel lately has been getting scarce. Do you know anybody up there?"

"Only a few," replied George, growing uncomfortable.

"From the city, I judge."

"Er-r—yes." George Brooklyn was not a man to remain quiet and be closely questioned. In fact he was expert at dodging, and this [illegible] seemed to suggest that he might not [illegible] everything asked him in such a good [illegible] so he reversed [illegible] himself. "I suppose [illegible] place—[illegible]

"Yes,—[illegible]

but there 's enough of us,— five girls, not counting my adopted sister. She don't live here, but teaches down in the valley." George smiled at this. He remembered some one who taught in the valley too. "When summer sets in we 'll be rushed, I tell you; it'll take all five of us, and my brother John besides, to keep things looking smart. How long do you expect—" But her question was broken abruptly by some one rushing toward the door and hastily opening it, and a young girl stood on the threshold looking confused and half dazzled by the glare of the pine-wood fire. She was very pretty. George Brooklyn noticed instantly her large dark eyes full of warmth and expression, her black hair curling in heavy masses about her face, and the brilliant pomegranate color burning on her cheeks and lips. Her surprise at seeing him had completely embarrassed her, and she stood glancing half wildly around the room, not knowing what to do. She was quickly relieved by Milcie, who said cordially, "Come right in, Nita, and take a chair. This gentleman here 's been threatened with a fainting-spell, or something, and I 'm only burning a little spirits for him,— that 's all. Going up with the stage, I suppose."

The girl advanced and seated herself near Milcie. She had a crimson shawl over her head, which she allowed to drop about her shoulders and reveal the abundance of her glossy dark hair; then she sat motionless, the color on her cheeks burning brighter, and looking earnestly and half pityingly toward George. He was pleased with her. He could see strong feeling and sensitiveness in her face, and he liked her dashing Spanish beauty, as well as her shy awkwardness.

"Did you see your father, Nita?" asked Milcie.

"Yes," bashfully.

"I thought you'd catch him. Too bad they sent him after that fellow they discharged, because a whole load's coming through to-morrow for the mine; and they won't be hard up for hands then, I judge. Did your father see him?"

"No; he had word about the new force, so he came back with me."

"Pshaw! I thought he'd go his eight miles for nothing when I heard of it. Is he going to let you start up to Quartz Hill to-morrow?"

"I don't know. He said, since he was coming back with me, we need n't settle that till we got home."

"It would be rough on you to be riding round the country for the sake of asking him, and then not get to go after all."

During this conversation Nita looked steadily into the fire, except when she flashed a bright, admiring glance toward George, and caught him looking at her, which compelled her to return again to her apparent study of the glowing coals. When Milcie left the room for milk with which to prepare the brandy, George was anxious to attract her attention, but she sat immovable as stone, without raising her eyes. Here was promise of amusement for him for the moment, and if she lived near Lucky Streak, more in the future most certainly. Besides, he felt slightly piqued, mistaking her shyness for indifference.

She was seated near him, so from his lounge he reached out and gave her dress a little pull. She turned indignantly upon him, but uttered not a word.

"You are distant to strangers, I see," ventured George.

"*You* are guilty of queer proceedings, for even a stranger," she replied haughtily. "I'm not a fool, sir."

"Aha," thought he, "she's wiser than I judged. I'll try another mode." Then aloud, "You might notice me, though, when you see I am ill, and feel lonesome here without friends."

This partly won her, for she said, more pleasantly, yet with a touch of sarcasm, "I am sorry. Can I do anything?"

"I've just been asking you, — rather suggesting that you be more sociable. It is cheering to have a pleasant word."

Nita was equal to the emergency when she thought him rude to her, but now her bashfulness returned. She could think of nothing to say, though her expressive face spoke for her, — told him she could not fathom his behavior, and that she mistrusted him. He was ready for it, but Milcie returning with the milk and brandy, prevented further conversation. "You'd better drink it now," she said, "the stage's about off." He drank it without saying more, and while Milcie helped him with his overcoat and gave him a flask of the drink she had prepared, for his use on the way, Nita slipped out quietly and waited in the porch for her father to bring around their horses.

"Who is that girl?" asked George, when she was gone.

"Nita Logan. She lives up near Lucky Streak, and her father works in the mine; he's Irish, and her mother Spanish, — a queer mixture perhaps; but Nita's

good looking, you see. I guess you are spoiled yourself."

George laughed, and Miss continued: "Most all the young men coming in this way are more or less struck on her because she is pretty. I think but little of my sister, says it's because she don't notice them. She don't care for em nuther, and nuther she does and never becomes in anyhow, she's even hateful. She never speaks a word to one of em, unless they say something to her. I guess she don't care a whit — that's the way of that part." George was pleased to hear that she loved a conquest.

"Where is she going? To a Lucky Strike or the stage?"

"No; she and her father are a-horseback, they'll ride along in company with us, I suppose. It's unfortable going through the pine woods alone in the night."

"Thanks for your kindness. Where do I go to settle?"

"Nowhere. I've done nothing to be paid for. You're welcome."

George bowed politely, thanked her again, and passed out into the porch, where Nita was waiting. It is very easy to talk in the dark, especially if something is to be said that might reveal embarrassment on the speaker's part; so even George — and not wholly for his sake—chose a moment of darkness to speak, that Nita's surprise might not betray itself in her face, and thus doubly embarrass her, and also because, since truth loves the light and error hides in darkness, he felt it more consistent on his own part to work in his

appointed time. Nita stood on the end of the porch, looking out upon the pines that grew close to the house in dark, gloomy masses, and idly stirring a spray of honeysuckle that dipped into the cool, dripping waters of the tank beside the porch. George crossed over lightly to where she was, and laid his hand upon her arm. She started as if she had not heard him, shaking the vine into a shower of glistening diamonds over them both, and stepped backward into a little stream of light that poured forth from one of the windows, revealing the quick anger in her dark face.

"I came for that sympathy you promised," said George, shrinking into the darkness, that she might not see the smile he could not repress. She made no answer, but stood half trembling, yet indignantly defiant. Then he came closer and bent over her kindly and reassuringly, and said: "Believe me, I am in earnest. I have found my maid of the mountains in you, for you are a sweet Spanish beauty."

Still no word, but she did not move away from him. So with this slight shadow of encouragement, George put his hand caressingly against her cheek, and was about to whisper something close to her face, when she dashed herself violently away and stood before him, trembling with rage and indignation that she could not express. "Go away!" she cried, so loud that George turned anxiously to see if any one had overheard her. The hostler and driver were standing near the horses talking, and did not seem to notice, but Edward Dennett and Miss Minton were just passing out through the other end of the porch, for the warning cry had been given to the passengers to be ready to start, so George

realized that he too must go, else all attention would soon be centred on him.

"Well, good by; I must go now," he said. "You are unkind to me when I have chosen you to be my lovely mountain nymph. I will see you again, though; I could not resist seeking one so pretty as you. So good by again." And then he left her, after lingering a moment for the answer that did not come; and when he had climbed to his seat on the stage, and comfortably composed himself, while the driver was drawing up his lines and taking off the brakes and the blocks were being removed from behind the wheels, he glanced back and saw Nita waiting just as she was before he disturbed her, yet he knew that she had not been indifferent to him at least, for he could see her excitedly breaking off little clusters of the vine and throwing them impatiently into the brimming waters of the tank. He laughed quietly to himself, and turned, satisfied and forgetful of her, to watch the pine tops gently tossing in the night wind far below him in the cañon as they rolled away.

It was eight miles to Lucky Streak mines, and up hill a good part of the journey. The road led through heavy pine forests and along rock-armored hillsides, so that the ride was a dark one, and a rough one as well. George thought no more of Nita, for she and her father rode some distance behind the stage, and never came in sight. Finally, as they neared the top of a long grade, the cold grew so intense that George suffered severely, and asked the driver in desperation to provide him with some sort of scarf or blanket to wrap about his ears and neck. The driver fumbled about fruit-

lessly for a while, but being so accustomed himself to the sharp night air in the mountains, he felt little sympathy, and so gave it up, telling George they would soon be down in a cañon again, where it would be sheltered and warmer. However, during one of their stops to rest the horses on the hill, Nita and her father came up to the stage, and a sudden thought seizing the driver, he called out familiarly, "Say, Nita, ain't you got an extra shawl or saddle-blanket along? A weak chap aboard here 's most froze, and wants something to do up his neck in." Nita checked her horse's hurried step just in the glow of the stage-lamps, that revealed her, like a magic picture outlined against the dull red bank walling in the road on one side, her dark eyes glistening though half blinded by the sudden light, seated proudly on her steaming horse.

"O yes, I've a shawl here behind my saddle that I do not use," she said, and began to untie it. The driver passed it to George when she handed it to him. She remained for a moment irresolute, and then addressing herself to the driver, said vehemently, as if maddened at seeing George appropriate it to his own comfort, "No, indeed! Not for him! Give me back my shawl."

George illy failed to hide his surprise, for though accustomed to acts equally ill-bred and cruel, he had never seen them performed so openly, yet he folded it with an humble air, and passed it back to her; still she did not relent, and only looked half ashamed as she took it. He tried to catch her eye, and show her by his face that he did not resent her unkindness, but she studiously avoided him, and when she had put the

shawl back again said hurriedly, "Good night, Paul," to the driver, and galloped away.

"Our young lady is saucy," remarked George, lightly, to the driver.

"Yes," he answered. "She 's been overbid. Tell a girl she 's pretty most, and seems like she never would get over it. That 's the trouble with Nita; but then she 's a tolerable good girl, too."

How far was either from the true state of things! Little could they see that, though uncultured and unlearned, she had keen sensibilities that brooked no rough handling, even though it was offered in the garb of friendliness; and that only in a spirit of mild retaliation she had returned what she had been compelled to receive, though she did it in a more objectionable form. Yet there were ample excuses for her,—because she knew no other way to repel what she felt to be an insult, and because she could not bear it in silence.

After she was out of sight a stillness settled over them, and both men sat for a long time absorbed in thought, —George reflecting not the most pleasantly on his crushed vanity, that had suffered at the hands of both Miss Minton and Nita. The toiling stage creaked, the horses stumbled over rocks that struck fire at every step, and the thick pines met above the road, sometimes letting through glimpses of the dark night sky lighted with its nebulous splendors, whose pale light struggled through the cold, clear air and reached them in slender bars of diamond brightness. The sharp air finally produced a feeling of drowsiness, and George dozed off into a nap, sometimes waking suddenly as they went jarring over ruts, but quickly relapsing into unconscious-

ness, until he was roused from a sound sleep by the sudden cessation of all sound, and an oppressive silence reigning, instead of the steady creak and clatter of the moving stage. While he was rubbing his eyes and trying to move his stiffened muscles, he heard the loud excited cry of "Lucky Streak Mines!" ringing through the stillness, and saw a score or more of lights scattered about on the hillsides, flashing warmly through the gloom; so he climbed down from the stage, feeling very glad to follow Edward Dennett toward the great hotel, where a blaze of light from the brilliantly glowing windows promised waiting hospitality to the chilled and tired travellers.

# CHAPTER IV.

## A GLIMPSE OF THE DOCTOR.

My soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.
LOUDON.

COME and let us look in at the Doctor a week or so after his visit to Miss Warren, as he sits in his quiet, cobwebbed office, situated out of the noise and excitement of the town, where the pink-and-white blossoms of the sweet-pease twine about his smoke-dimmed windows, and the swaying green branches of the locusts bend now and then to brush away in little streaks the thick layer of dust that has settled outside. It is a small room, but a bright one, with large windows looking out toward the east, that let in floods of sunshine, lighting up the faded green carpet and the shining gilt on the backs of his substantially bound books, ranged in even rows along the walls, and seeming to rest more tenderly than elsewhere on the Doctor's gray hair, blending its golden-brown and silver locks into beautiful lights and shadows, as he sits at his long, paper-strewn desk, his head resting on his hand, thinking gravely.

The Doctor was a thoughtful man, a man who loved solitude and quiet. All his life he had kept himself apart from others, delving deep into the minutest recesses of study, trying experiments with his carefully collected heaps of herbs and chemicals, or writing the

results of his labors into lectures for delivery or publication. Few people had ever known him intimately. He had an aversion to strangers, notwithstanding his profession brought him into daily contact with them. To his friends he was warm-hearted and frank, but outside the range of his friendships the Doctor was almost an awkward man, often finding himself in uncomfortable straits, from which he usually managed to retreat, though not always in the most graceful manner. But a stranger who impressed him favorably was cordially welcomed to a place among his friends, and treated as such, however premature such unreserved and familiar behavior might appear. Indeed, the Doctor knew no other way to treat people; it was either in his own candid, sincere manner, or he made serious blunders in trying to be ceremonious, and could only end in confusion or mortification. Thus people were his friends or they knew him not. But he was so self-sacrificing that he seldom asked a favor, and he was always so kind and obliging that few ever remembered they could do a service for him in return, and hence they received not that full, free confidence which, with people like the Doctor, is born of gratitude.

Into his inner life — into that deep, secret place of the heart where few may come, even to those who are most open and free — no one had ever entered. If he had a sorrow, he bore its bitterest pangs alone; if he had a joy, its best delight lay far below that exterior which the world can see, imbuing his sensibilities with such an unspeakable charm, such a subtile delight, that he could never give it full expression without its seeming insipid to him compared to what he really felt.

And the Doctor was never insipid, surely, although his charity and his natural kindness often caused him to notice little things which seemed insignificant and almost absurd when compared to his own native dignity, that could even permeate his comical little gig and his highly inappropriate yellow gloves with an air of grave importance because they belonged to him. Those who knew him always recognized this dignity despite his eccentricities; and others, though often disposed to make light of his defects, learned speedily to respect him.

But with regard to the Doctor's friend, his confidential, dearly beloved and trusted friend,—alas for him! there had never been such a one. And still it was not the Doctor's fault. There was only one way into that holiest place of his heart, and he himself could not point it out. To one who had lived such an unselfish life as his, it was not strange that it should be his mission to serve others, and hear and minister to their misfortunes rather than to receive the loving care and the appreciative ear that had been his life-long wants. Who ever thought of sympathizing with the Doctor, when he was so necessary to everybody else's comfort that they could not spare him the time to brood over his own woes? In fact, most of his friends thought he never had any; for although unreserved in many respects, he was painfully timid with reference to himself.

And so it can readily be inferred that since the Doctor had never known an intimate friend, his love affairs had not been surprisingly frequent. If his heart had ever known a touch of the divine passion, it seldom promised more than a remote fulfilment,—in fact, he

crushed it out if it threatened to lead him into any outward demonstration. But he had never known the sweetness of contented love, so no wonder he dreamed dreams and indulged fancies of what his heart longed for, and then banished them as sentimentally ridiculous, a creation of his own heart, and as something that did not in reality exist.

But had the Doctor been less faint-hearted with respect to these things, he would not have been so easily discouraged as to cherish in silence or hide as unworthy of manly, practical strength his want of some one to care for, or he would have at least experimented with it, to satisfy himself so far as his own case was concerned.

That trite old saying about the sins of bachelors could not be applied to him with the dimmest shadow of truth; he was pure and noble, and true to himself so far as his light could guide him, and that is all that any of us can be. If we err then, it is rather a defect for which we are not responsible, or an accident for which we should not be held accountable.

And hence he had lived his life, little knowing what he missed, or how easily that obstacle in his path might be removed if any one could ever find it out, and often felt that after all, as many of us do, the world was not altogether such a charming place as he had at first imagined; yet he made the most of it for want of a better one, since he still had the advantage of escaping its deadliest sorrows, if he found not its most precious happiness. He took up life's duties very cheerfully, and even ambitiously, and much he had accomplished, earning eminence in his profession, and confidence and gratitude from many friends.

He was always in a hurry, yet he did not work rapidly, for he gave such careful attention to the minutest detail, put himself out so often to help some one in need of his assistance, and so frequently indulged his habit of meditation, that he lost many minutes of what he considered his limited time. Yet he had ample patience with anybody who trespassed upon his valuable hours; and as an instance of this leniency, let us cite the case of his lazy white horse, that imposed on his benevolence so much as to take her own time on all occasions, though sometimes pretending to be in as much of a hurry as he. He knew it in a measure, and bought his big whip for her benefit, but he was too kind-hearted ever to use it, even though his smart Lady Snowdrop often took half a day to make a two hours' trip.

And for an example of his meditative indulgencies, let us think of him as we see him on this morning when we uninvited intrude upon his unconscious hospitality and read his thoughts as he sits in his office so absorbed in reflection that he has forgotten half his morning has been spent in this way, and that the fat white horse hitched out under the locust grove is luxuriating in the fact that she is two hours his debtor already, and that it is much pleasanter there in the balmy, sun-dotted shadow than dragging the gig away over the roads on the Doctor's journeys.

He was taking all this time, — which he would regret further on he knew, — wondering whether Miss Warren would be horrified should he invite her to drive out to the hospital with him some day, and pay his languishing patients a visit; not that he was the least inclined to be attentive to her, but she was such a

bright, cheerful girl, and appreciating woman's quick, intuitive discernment in the sick-room, he felt certain she would be able to make valuable suggestions which would never occur to him. He had seen her often since his first visit, and she had sometimes been fairly enthusiastic over their plans. If she had been less interested in the work she had undertaken, the Doctor would never have dreamed of such a thing; but he was now almost persuaded she would go if he explained it to her, and yet he hesitated, fearing she would misunderstand him in some way. She was so very busy that she seldom availed herself of any little pastime; and now that spring was on her way over the low bright hills, with dainty early blossoms hiding deep in the new fresh grass, and waxy clusters of buttercups shining in the dewiest hollows, he hoped that she would take as much pleasure in seeing them as he would in showing them to her, and perhaps that would be an extra inducement for her to go.

He took up almost reverently her offerings for his patients, and noted how neat and fresh and sweet were the well-chosen bunches of lilacs and roses, honeysuckles, pinks, and chrysanthemums; how carefully selected her stories and sketches, clipped from papers or marked in magazines; and also how thoughtful a warm, sympathetic letter for one poor fellow he had told her about, and to whom she had conceived the idea of writing as a change for him, and perhaps a relief also. Finally he did what was very unusual with him in such a case, — he resolved to ask her anyway. And then he started up suddenly from his long reverie, hurriedly placed his flowers and stories in a basket, took

his medicine-chest and overcoat, and went out to wake up Lady Snowdrop.

Too much inactivity had made her lazier than ever, and all his urging could only induce her to jog wearily along on a slow trot.

Riding out into the suburbs of the village, he passed the little red school-house glowing brightly from its grove of trees. It was recess time, and the children were scattered about over the grounds playing ball; while among the shrubbery he caught sight of the school-mistress walking up and down the green turf with a crowd of the younger children listening, wide-mouthed and breathless, to some wonderful story she seemed to be relating. In reality, it was one of her own invention, of fairy origin, and embellished elaborately with flying vehicles that looked like bees or birds when high up in the air, but which, when they alighted on the ground, turned out to be only gigs, with great wheels for wings that buzzed round and round. These odd vehicles had little fairies in them, whose hands were made of pure yellow gold, which the other fairy folk disliked very much, although the queer fairies who flew about were very good people; and when the sky was darkened with these weird flying things, and the air was filled with a deep, roaring buzz, everybody knew that they were coming to bring honey-dew and pieces of bright, silver-hued cloud for all the poor little fairies that were not big enough to get these things for themselves. The gig part was not a premeditated feature, but one that grew out of the story as she was telling it, like a sudden inspiration, and she had just got to the place where she had to describe the humming

noise when something very appropriate to the story sounded out in the road. She looked, and there was the Doctor, appearing very opportunely, and so she laughed and felt quite merry over it. He had thought when he first saw her it would be a good opportunity to speak, and then immediately his courage had failed, and he decided to postpone it to a future time, although the following day was Saturday, when he would have liked to take her out to the hospital. He had actually urged Lady Snowdrop into a run as he passed along by the fence and the gate, but Miss Warren suddenly caught a glimpse of him, and bowed pleasantly and smiled, as if to bid him godspeed on his mission, and then seeing him pull up the reins slightly, ran down by the fence to speak with him.

The school-mistress was sociable and agreeable and in the best of spirits that morning, so she chatted away animatedly, all the while looking curiously at his high-wheeled cart, and smiling to herself to think such a story about it as she had just been telling the children should present itself to her fancy. And finally, when the Doctor summoned up courage enough to suggest his new plan to her, and the thought struck her suddenly that she soon would have a drive in that odd little cart which had made such an impression upon her mind, she laughed outright, and thereby hurt the Doctor's feelings grievously; for considering his long meditation over the matter, he was of course even more sensitive than usual. But she answered him so heartily and earnestly, that she would take great pleasure in going, and seemed so sweet and gentle standing there under the trees, the rich yellow sunshine drifting down through the shad-

ows and touching her nut-brown hair with gleams of gold, while her soft blue eyes, like the star anemones of the fields, looked up to him so innocently and reassuringly, that he felt somewhat soothed. Yes it mattered, she said, and she would be all ready at any hour he might name. So they planned to start rather early, because it was so pleasant riding in the fresh morning air. And then the Doctor drove away, feeling yet a little uncomfortable because she had laughed. Before he had gone far he heard one of the children call out in a shrill, plaintive tone, "Teacher, won't you please tell us now the rest of that story about the fairies that live among the sulky-looking things?" and "teacher" was humbly but cruelly misunderstood had misconstrued the idea, even though it had called the wonders such unromantic names as sulkies, while the Doctor wondered a little if it could have any remote reference to his gig. But he smiled around, and his ears was partially restored when he saw the school-mistress standing where he had left her — leaning upon the fence and looking thoughtfully and dreamily out toward the low line of hills in the distance, her fair face looking like a delicate little flower unfolding out of the leafy leaves behind her.

Lady Snowdrop was aggravatingly indifferent all day, and annoyed the Doctor considerably by persistently refusing to hurry herself a particle; but reaction of the worst nature followed when the Doctor's man walked her out of the stable before sunrise the next morning, two hours earlier than usual, when the air was not any too warm, and gave her white hide a good rubbing with a wet sponge, and then brushed

her into the gig, that had undergone a polishing also, and drove her around to the Doctor's office. Yet she had known worse days, for she had formerly belonged to the first Dr. Knapp, who knew how to use a whip quite effectively, and she had been trotted out on numerous occasions and taken to the office, which had been his also, at very untimely hours, sometimes in the dead of night. But lately life had been getting so delicious that this treatment seemed harsh in comparison.

The Doctor came out very briskly, and consequently gave her a terrible fright, by making her think it was really the first Dr. Knapp back again, and no doubt she felt as if she should be dealt with very considerately on account thereof;—of all which the Doctor was profoundly ignorant, and so could not be censured for not acting accordingly sympathetic, though it is more than likely he would have done so had he known.

Miss Warren was not in a mood to laugh about the Doctor's cart this morning when he drove up, even though his horse stepped as high as ever, and he made such a short turn out in front of the gate that the huge fish-rod whip standing out grandly on the right appeared like a pivot with the left wheel and the horse swinging round it. She greeted him so cordially that he felt as delighted as a boy, and assisted her into the gig with far more boldness than he otherwise would have done, and could not help feeling a little proud, as they drove out of town through the locust groves, to have her there, —such a sweet, light-hearted young girl, shedding sunshine freely all around her, and actually planning for and taking a deep interest in his work.

Locustville was a pretty little village, its homelike

houses planted like a selection of gems in the midst of the great valley country, and from a road smooth and hard and well kept, led out in all directions, inset for quite a distance with acacias that made very pleasant drives. Lois was in a most joyous mood, taking a keen pleasure in the green trees that had budded out with full bright leaves, and after they reached the open levels, still more in the gentle vapor steaming forth with the first promise of spring-time in the new spread like a white frosty cast over all the grass, and sparkling brilliantly as they rode past, with green and white and purple flashes in the weather seeming sunshine, and in the air that bore a delightful freshness and exhilaration, and the sweet early odors of the flower seasons.

So they drove in together while the country opened out around them like the fair pastures of Israel, becoming so interested in their conversation that both forgot Lady Sunwing was taking advantage of their abstraction, not feeling particularly lively after getting up so early, even if the world was lovely and hearts were light.

The school-mistress could not resist a strange feeling of satisfaction that she was riding in the car that had exercised such an influence over her mind when she first saw it; and besides, it was remarkably easy to ride in, much more so than it looked to be, rolling smoothly into the shallow ditches and springing out again with a lightness that was very pleasant. She wondered how they looked there in the gig. She could scarcely add herself to the picture, the Doctor alone on the wide seat seemed so inseparably connected with it; yet she knew they must look quite the same, for there

was the whip and everything, even to the gloves. She turned toward the Doctor to see them again,—she was always so irresistibly attracted to them,—and saw on the lapel of his coat something she had not noticed before. It was a tiny bunch of forget-me-nots and honeysuckles, which she recognized as one of those she had sent him the evening before for his patients, although he had ingeniously disguised its identity by putting in with it a locust leaf,—the only thing in the way of an addition to the flowers he could procure when he took it. Her heart was touched. It betokened such feeling and pride, blended with such a gentle heart, that it sent a thrill and a warmth to her own. "The dear old Doctor," she said to herself; "how very, very nice and good he is!"

## CHAPTER V.

### [illegible]

[illegible]
A richer soil and [illegible] a quicker seed:
You look for it, and see it not, and lo!
Even while you seek, the precious flower is nip.
[illegible]

*The Franchised.*

A SHARP, high voice, breaking rudely upon the stillness of the long corridors in the hospital, greeted the Doctor and Lois as they reached the head of the broad staircase. "Maybe I will, and maybe I won't," it said: and a little red-haired girl of about sixteen, with two bright red spots burning on her cheeks, and the acme of anger snapping in both her round blue eyes, came down to meet them, fairly sputtering to herself.

"Hy there," said the Doctor, lifting his finger warningly. "That 's unkind, Nettie, to make such a noise — such a disturbance — among sick folks. What 's the trouble?"

"Well, I 'll just tell you," said she, standing herself up saucily before them. "That mean, contemptible — "

"Be careful," chided the listener.

"Well, I don't care, she is one. And I 'll tell you what she did. I thought I 'd get up a little fun amidst those long-faced, sober-eyed creatures, who never smile once a century, and so I played an innocent little joke, — I just dripped some water on Sam Nailor's head, to

see him get mad and try to find out where it came from, and she said I should n't come into her ward again if she had to dust and sweep nights herself to keep me out, and she actually boxed my ears and pushed me through the door."

"Who did?"

"Why, that mean, old, vinegar-mouthed, lazy —"

"Here, here! You are excited; you are too angry," said the Doctor. "Tell me who, without any description of what she is like, — just the simple name."

"Well, I will, if I can mention such a — such a — well, Mrs. Kent, who don't know anything but to eat and boss, and be just as fault-finding, and insinuating, and disagreeable —" She stopped, not because she remembered the Doctor's injunctions, but because she noticed Lois for the first time, in her blind rage, as something worth seeing instead of a mere being in company with the Doctor. The two girls were about the same size, and had on hats nearly alike, broad-brimmed, bright straws of the same shape, but Nettie's was trimmed with knots of pink and white ribbon, and Lois had woven a bunch of English daisies into the lace on hers. Here, however, all likeness between them ended, for Nettie's flushed countenance suffered in comparison with the soft whiteness of Lois's expressive face. The Doctor had mistaken Lois for this wayward, impetuous girl that spring-time afternoon of the past, which seemed to her so very long ago, as he rode dreaming through the locust-trees; but he was so likely to commit such blunders from inattention that it was not at all surprising.

"Aha!" said Nettie, changing her sharp tone to one

of jest; "I 'll bet I know your tricks, Doctor. You remember one day some weeks ago when you came out from Locustville you told me you thought you saw me, but were mistaken. I — know — your — games. You were trying to flirt, and I just guess you have succeeded — "

"Come," said Dr. Knapp, sedately, stopping her. "I've no time to talk. Make no more noise here, Nettie; it 's very unkind to do so; I 'd advise you to take a walk till you feel better"; and he passed by her in a hurried manner, as if annoyed. Lois opened her eyes wide in wonder. Who was this girl who dared talk in such a strain to the grave, dignified, yet kind-hearted man beside her? However ludicrous he might appear sometimes by his carelessness in minor matters, or about things with which he was unacquainted, yet his kind manner and profound learning won their way to the esteem and respect of all.

However, he said nothing about her, appearing to be quite absorbed in thought, and Lois soon forgot it as they made their rounds through the quiet wards, and she found so much to do, and so many encouraging, comforting things to say to the poor sufferers, that the Doctor compared her in his mind to a sunbeam shining down upon a patch of primroses, making them bloom out wherever she passed. He did not say quite so much as that to her, though; but she knew he was greatly pleased. Lois had never had much experience in caring for the sick, but her warm, quick sympathies suggested scores of things to relieve them. She remained long at the bedside of the poor man to whom she had written the letter, feeling especially interested in him.

was suffering from a disease of the heart that made him look old and haggard, though he had not yet reached middle age. His eyes were very bright and his mind very active for one so wasted by the cruel hand of pain; and she discovered before she had talked long with him an imaginative vein in his conversation that was very pleasant, so she lingered to interest him in a story of one of her little pupils, and, to keep up his interest in it, promised to write the rest as it developed with time. He listened with eagerness, and talked freely with her about himself when she had finished. Incidentally she learned that he was a lawyer, and that his name was James Knowles. He was not exactly poor, he said, though his health had always prevented him from accumulating wealth. Then he grew enthusiastic, and his eyes blazed with light as he talked of the law, and launched into long arguments, developing into an orator of considerable interest, touching up his sentences with bright flashes of wit, and weaving poetical fancies into the dull, heavy prose of law, in a way that was very ingenious. Finally, he forgot his weakness entirely, and half rose on his elbow, while his voice lost its hollow rattle, and grew clear and mellow, and rose louder and louder, till Lois was quite alarmed lest he should become too excited, and increase his illness. So, in a pause, she said she must go, but promised to come and see him again if she visited the hospital, and to write the rest of her little story as fast as she learned it; and leaving him a bunch of violets, she stole quietly away.

The Doctor came to her in the little reception-room, after he had made his rounds, and told her it was time

for dinner. "I shall introduce you to a very good old lady, Miss Warren," he said. "She is a little queer,—a little odd,—but a very nice old lady. The young girl we saw as we came in is her grandchild,—a wayward girl, full of tricks and fun, a little high-tempered, but good in the main, I'm sure. I generally dine there when I remain over here all day, so she will expect us."

Lois went as in a dream through the wide, quiet streets, past lovely homes surrounded by fair, blooming gardens, and green, bright lawns, and here a hedge ablow with brilliant flowers, and there another scattering perfume on the soft air,—and all having a stately, quiet, and calm repose.

"This is Mrs. Hunman's house, where we are to dine," said the Doctor; "I like it, and do not mind the walk, though it is quite a distance out in the suburbs, and I'm generally in a hurry,—quite rushed,—and can scarcely spare the time."

It was an old, white, tumble-down house with a steep gable-roof and dim green blinds, but it was set in a mass of overgrown, luxuriant flowers, vines running riot, and trees with long, untrimmed, and whip-like branches stretching across the walk, and interweaving themselves into a tangle of apple and acacia, oleander and cherry, and scarlet-tipped pomegranate, until only the upper portion of the house, protected by the eaves, gleamed white through the glinting foliage. It was just the time of year to ramble through this queer old garden, when spring had changed its dusky green leaves to new ones, pale and oily and crinkled, and its grass grew knee-deep and sweet and wild, wilting in spots where

and washing dirty faces before any spectators who cared to look.

And so she took it as a matter-of-fact duty to be done, while the Doctor was so much surprised that he could scarcely settle the thought in his own mind for a few minutes. Nevertheless, he rather liked the idea, not any more because it was entirely new to him to have young ladies — or old ladies, either — offer to mend his gloves, than because it showed a warm heart that loved to be helpful with true womanly instinct.

Mrs. Hunman, a quaint old lady, with a long hook-nose, gray locks coiled in smooth loops on the back of her head, and gold-bowed glasses that were ever shining in the light like chips of ice, opened the door for them as they came up the steps, and showed them, with a great deal of ceremony, into her little parlor, worn and faded notwithstanding the fact that the sunshine seldom got a peep into its musty corners to steal away their bright hues. She was very slow and old-fashioned, and, as the Doctor had said, a little odd; but she had a patient, motherly look upon her face, indicating that she was certain to endure the wilful pranks of troublesome Nettie, and all other annoyances, with gentle forbearance.

Mrs. Hunman was seldom blessed with company. Her heart was so filled with her duties to the five grown sons, who came to "mother" like spoiled children whenever fortune did not roar with laughter, that she had little room left for other things. But to-day the dim green blinds were opened wide to let in the mellow sunlight, and out in the dining-room Nettie stepped about briskly to bring out Grandma Hunman's

snowdrop linen, her best silver, and fine china, while grandma herself made custards, roasted joints, and prepared sauces that were a marvel of deliciousness. And Lois, who ventured out to offer her help, fell in with the spirit of this festive occasion immediately, and beat up eggs and made creams with evident satisfaction, even enlisting the Doctor into service by calling on him to open a bottle of catsup, and getting him to roam about the garden in search of a garland with which to decorate the table.

After he had looked about helplessly in the hope of finding something appropriate, and even wishing it was herbs for medicine that he was hunting instead of flowers, he stood so in fear of offending Lois's delicate taste, she caught up her hat and went out to help him; and together they rambled about through the wild old garden, among its fruit-trees and flowers, and Lois at last gathered a bunch of white lilacs, vanquishing the Doctor when he suggested that they add a spray of pomegranate to brighten it. She was too practical to waste the fruit for the sake of the blossom, while the Doctor argued that the flower when matured into fruit could not give more pleasure than it would now in the vase. However, she had her way, and said Mrs. Hunman's pomegranate blooms should ripen if it depended on her to take them; so the Doctor gallantly dropped the subject.

He could not maintain his ground against so fair an adversary as Lois, flitting about in the neglected luxuriance of the garden, her lithe form and light gray dress reminding him of a happy little bird, and her face, with the soft white bloom upon it, of the delicate fairness of the pale syringas.

And on this day,—this inspiring, cool, sweet day of spring, when the grasses drank the sunshine and seemed glad, and the birds sang as if all the universe were full of joy, when the far-off hills stood out from their enveloping mists with a new beauty of purple, and seemed releasing from their heart of mysteries some spell of old that restored all the spirit longed for and dispelled its sorrows,—the Doctor himself yielded to this strange new charm of life, and felt his youth renewed, and hope once more, like a great rushing host of pleasures, fill his soul. He felt it lift him up on another plane of existence far above petty discords and selfish ambitions, to show him the great billowy beauty of that unknown country he had never seen save in his dreams, to assure him that its mystic splendors were indeed a reality, and to give him a breath of its perfumed breezes and a taste of its pure waters that bring more happiness than any other blessing to the children of earth,—the sacred springs of love.

The truth was, the Doctor was the veriest boy in his inward feelings; and it was the first free stirrings of this sentiment, which he had always crushed, that made the world seem fairer. The mere indulgence, as a tangible possibility, of these thoughts had unloosed the fountains of that holiest of holies in his heart, and the sweetness thereof seemed welling forth to enrich his life with a new-found glory forever after.

And so it was that he gathered more than earthly flowers that day, when life opened its best secret for him; he gathered blossoms, which, even when they blight, press forth their fragrance through all the weary days that follow, to cheer us and remind us they were

culled from the fair country that borders on the fields of Paradise.

To Lois the time seemed just like other times of spring and sunshine; no better joy was there than the bright reopening of the year, the sunlit day that was just like other days of light and bloom, and she was happy-hearted just because it was her nature so to be.

But to the Doctor her very presence gave forth unconsciously a spell that was more subtile, more potent in the garden of his heart, than the warming influence of the sun could be in all the golden pastures of the earth. It not only revived nature, but planted neglected desolation with the sweetness of the rose. And with that quiet delight came the purpose and the hope to keep her always near him. Not that this feeling took possession of his mind with any palpable distinctness; it crept over him with a peace that silenced all strivings after anything better, and he rested calmly in blissful contentment with the present, and felt satisfied with the undefined and beautiful yet unsought blessedness of the future that troubled him not.

If good Mrs. Hunman was unusually careful in the preparation of her dinner, she felt thrice repaid for the trouble she had taken in the serving of it. It was a rare occasion to her. And she was pleased with the homelike scene, when all were seated around the table, her five sons, — most of them nearly as old as the Doctor, but all bachelors except Nettie's father, who was a widower, and back under his mother's care again, — jolly old Mr. Hunman with his grizzly side-whiskers, and red hair all awry, looking like a subject for a picture-card, and Nettie cuddling up lovingly to

her grandpa, the only person in the world to whom she was uniformly civil; and then the Doctor and Lois, the distinguished company who honored Mrs. Hunman immeasurably, simply by their presence. And never, it seemed to her, did the light fall more prettily over her snowy linen till it seemed spotted with the white brightness of silver, over her polished glass till it glittered like crushed ice, and even over the drops of water on the goblet that held Lois's lilacs till they sparkled with a clearness that seemed purity and freshness crystallized.

Nettie was very quiet at first, but cast inquisitive and meaning glances from her round blue eyes toward the guests at regular intervals. By her defiant air, she evidently did not like Lois, yet she was more than ordinarily interested in watching every movement.

Mrs. Hunman was bent on entertaining the Doctor, but her simple store of conversation concerned only the workings of her own home, so she looked up over the glistening spectacles and said very earnestly, "It 's real nice weather we 're having these days, Doctor, is n't it? *He* helped with the wash yesterday. I thought I 'd have him, because the sun was so bright that the things dried quick." The Doctor was not much mystified by this remark, though Lois was puzzled to know who "he" could be. "He" was always Mr. Hunman. "He" constituted a combination of gardener who never worked, and housekeeper who figeted around the house with the women folks as if it were his natural sphere; but Mrs. Hunman never explained whom she meant. That was always to be found out by the elucidation of subsequent transactions in which "he" figured, or by direct questioning.

Dr. Knapp agreed with her, however, that the weather was very pleasant, and then asked, "Did you try your new plan of feeding peppered milk to your chickens, Mrs. Hunman?"

Nettie's eyes snapped, and she was prompt with an answer before her slow old grandmother could realize what had been said.

"Feed it to them! I should say we did, and it effected such a cure as would make Rome howl with envy,—or at least, any one would think it *might* be Rome, and two or three heathen cities thrown in, if they'd heard the dogs, their mouths watering for chicken bones." There was a vindictive little tone in her voice, that meant something, though she intended all should understand her as jesting.

"I guess you did n't feed it to them —" commenced the Doctor.

"But did n't I just tell you we *did?*" snapped Nettie.

"But not in a proper quantity,—you gave them *too* much."

"Well, suppose we did. Lots of people get *too much* of lots of things, but they don't always die about it. Pity they don't sometimes. I'd administer several doses of 'too much' then. But I don't think *you'd* ever get too much flirta —"

"What a charming garden you have, Mrs. Hunman," remarked Lois, ingeniously, just at the right moment.

"Yes, a delightfully convenient place for dozens and *young* ladies" —just a slight emphasis on the "young" that made an impression, yet passed as unnoticed —"to roam about making love — lovely language. It

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ity, and to give him a breath o
and a taste of its pure waters t
ness than any other blessing to t
the sacred springs of love.

The truth was, the Doctor w
inward feelings; and it was the
sentiment, which he had alway
world seem fairer. The mere
possibility, of these thoughts h
of that holiest of holies in his
thereof seemed welling forth h
new-found glory forever after.

And so it was that he gathe
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The sunbeams were beginning to fall aslan
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ght, wh[illegible] he drove up to the gate at a si

was built just for that, of course. But why did n't you take the pomegranate flowers, Doctor? It would have been much prettier. I heard you quarrelling about it, and I picked a lot anyway, afterward. They 're in the parlor now."

"Well, come to see the lilacs alone, they are quite as pretty as they would be with the others," said the Doctor.

"Yes, I've no doubt you think so. You are a man, and a man always likes the homeliest things in creation; perhaps because they are so much like himself. But —"

Mrs. Hunman was horrified. "Nettie," she said, slowly, "you are very saucy. You had better not stay here. Howard, can't you say something to her?"

Nettie sat silent but defiant. Mr. Hunman came to the rescue, and said gently, "Nettie, I really think Jack is suffering for water. 'E 'as n't 'ad any to-day that I know of. You 'd better tend to it right now."

Jack was grandpa's dog, and Nettie liked him only because grandpa did; but his words pacified her some, and she prepared to leave the table. One of her long array of uncles, the invincible Byron, who loved to add a word or two to aggravate her when she was in an angry mood, said, tantalizingly, "If the report goes out around town that you have to be sent from the table many more times, you 'll never get married in the world."

"Neither will any of the rest of you," replied Nettie, with telling effect. She even wished that she dared to add something about the overwhelming majority of old bachelors and old maids, and even old widowers, at the

table, but she refrained for grandpa's sake; so with a bow she rose, slyly pushing the dishes ahead of her, until they struck a pitcher of cream, that was overturned into Lois's lap. Then she left the room laughing to herself, and hurried away so fast that she could not hear Mrs. Hunman's call to bring a damp towel quickly, and the good old lady had to get it herself. But she was even slower than the Doctor, who succeeded in furnishing napkins and his handkerchief before she returned.

Lois could have cried about her dress, but she said nothing, and after the cream was all wiped up and the meal progressing in quiet again, she even forgot it.

The Doctor was such a gentleman in his instincts, notwithstanding his shyness, that he adroitly introduced subjects agreeable to all, and made Mrs. Hunman's dinner a very pleasant one in spite of wicked Nettie. Besides, he was very happy this day, and his happiness was so contagious that it put every one around him in good humor.

And after dinner, and an hour or two had been spent with the family in the pleasant little parlor, the Doctor left Lois to discuss with Mrs. Hunman whether "he" had better skim the milk at night or in the morning, and went away to bring Lady Snowdrop and the gig around to be ready for their departure. He had left her down near the hospital, so he had to walk quite a distance, and it was getting late when he drove back.

The sunbeams were beginning to fall aslant, and steal in through the purple shadows with subdued light, when he drove up to the gate at a side en-

trance to the garden, and the children had gathered around for evening play. A group of boys were marching up and down beside Mrs. Hunman's house, bearing something triumphantly above them on a stick, while a steady fire of turf and dirt was pelting them from over the fence. This thing that they bore so proudly, and sang "hi diddle dum de dum" to, looked rather familiar, but somehow the Doctor could not understand what this mass of crushed straw and soiled pink ribbon could mean.

"What are you doing, boys?" he asked.

Young America, in the form of a blank-faced urchin, turned and answered, "Huh?"

"What have you there on that stick?"

"O-o-oh! That's little sputter-up's hat. She tore it up and flung it out here; an' we've got it an' are a-plaguin' her with it. She's the girl that lives in that there house, an' she gets awful mad. Her name's Nettie Hunman. I heard her rowing, an' she said right out loud that it was homely, jest like some other girl as had one like it."

And when they were advised to discontinue their sport, the boys reminded the Doctor that he did not refrain from having good times when he was a "youngster," and could "git 'em," although the Doctor knew better.

But that was the last he saw or heard of Nettie that day. When they drove away she was not present with the rest of the family to bid them good by, and then they forgot even her existence in the beauties of the fading day, the rosy sunset and the sleepy flowers that curled up into mere buds, and left whole meadows, that

had flamed with gold or scarlet, nothing but dotted beds of green.

The rich tender dusk stole around them as they drove along, the dews fell over the dim and fading pastures, and the tall grasses, heavy with its weight, nodded over shrill-voiced crickets that buzzed and sang for miles along their way, while the road stretched white and curving far out ahead of them, through grassy plains, till lost in the groves of Locustville.

Snowdrop travelled along steadily, being headed for home, and the Doctor felt this the happiest day of all his life, even unmarred by the trifling events that had seemed to disturb it; so he drank in with a reverent feeling all the beauty of the fading landscape, swimming black and mystic up against the burning line along the west, and the darkening blue dome above, where the stars swung like golden censers raining incense through the balmy air, scattering all around upon the cool, gentle breezes a fragrance and an elixir that seemed even to renew his life, and satisfied all the yearnings of his lonely heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

### UNSEEN OBSERVERS.

**Keen eyes that glow**
**Unseen from brambles**
**Crowned with bloom, like snow.**
*Selected.*

MORNING in the Sierras! What a suggestion of breezy freshness in the cold, clear air, steeped in the rare sweet aroma of the woods! What a vision of snow-peaks and lofty pines, and cool, dark cañons overgrown with creeping vines and rank, rich ferns!

Nellie Minton rose early, hoping to see Edward Dennett before he became engrossed in business so deeply as to forget her; and had she been of a different temperament, she would have been sufficiently repaid for it though she had missed him. As it was, though it did not wholly satisfy her, she could not help entering into a mild admiration of the view from her window, of the wild mountains, clear-cut and brightly blue, deepened with purple folds and seams, and set between a chain of snow and the great timber belt sweeping over the nearer hills in a vast surging ocean of fir and pine. "It is very pretty up here," she said, as she turned, yawning, to the mirror. "Though it is not at all as I remember the place. I'm glad I have one whole day to myself, anyway; to-morrow perhaps I'll not be so pleased. I wonder if I have too much jewelry on for

breakfast at a country resort," surveying herself in her elegant dark morning-dress. "I cannot spare ear-rings nor pin, and my watch I hate to leave up here, for fear I may not see it again. Well, well, here it goes. I could afford to lose it if its absence would gain me *anything* in another direction."

Miss Minton descended the stairs to the bright little morning-room, where several of the guests had already assembled and were admiring the beauty of the scenery from the broad, clear windows looking out toward the majestic, sun-bathed mountains. But the clear morning had no further charms for her when she found none of her friends among them, and so she seated herself by the fire, away from the rest. Soon she heard a quick, firm step along the hall, and Edward Dennett appeared in the door. "Good morning, Miss Minton," he said, cheerily. "You are sitting by the fire; are you chilly? I was just coming to invite you to view our splendid landscape from the veranda."

"No, indeed, I'm not cold," answered Nellie. "I was a little lonesome, that is all, and so I came here by myself," she added, demurely, and rose to follow him out. She went into ecstacies over the tall yellow pines, the unpretentious yet picturesque camp below them, where the miners lived, the mill with its new roof reaching high into the trees around it, and the torn piles of red earth and rocks gleaming still beyond. All this was magnificent when Edward was standing near her, though she saw but little of its beauty when he was absent.

He escorted her into breakfast and waited on her very politely, and afterward brought her a number

of entertaining books and magazines, saying kindly, "These, I hope, will afford some pastime for you, Miss Nellie, when you are wearied with looking about the place. I regret that I cannot spare a little time to relieve your loneliness to-day, but business is so urgent I fear I shall be hurried as it is. I wish you a pleasant day." With these words he hastened away as if he had already intruded upon his precious moments.

Nellie was not a young lady who was fond of reading. She looked over the books carelessly in her room, and then put them aside without reading a page, yawning indolently, and saying to herself, "Well, well; now I must depend on George Brooklyn to amuse me. He shall, too, or I'll amuse myself some time, — at his expense." But the unhappy George escaped this evil only by enduring a greater one, — he was too ill to rise. He had taken a severe cold on his journey, and so kept his room nearly all day, leaving the restless Miss Minton to interest herself, — which she managed to do, though not very successfully, until she saw him come out toward evening and wrap himself up as if intending to take a walk. A thought which seemed to Nellie singularly bright suggested itself to her, and taking her hat and a light wrap she went out too. "It'll be fun," she thought, "and I don't care much if he does catch me; he knows I have the advantage, anyway. It'll be jolly, in the absence of anything better, to see what kind of mischief the wretch will indulge in first."

He walked along listlessly across the hillside and through the trees, till he came to a little bridle-path winding in and out among the ferny rocks, and over the wood-tangled gulches, and at last reached a little open-

ing where they could see another path that crossed the grassy swale just below. George was disappearing in the thicket on the other side of this bit of cleared ground, and Nellie was watching him, to see if it was best to venture across, when she observed him stop and look at some object through the trees opposite, and the next minute Nita came in sight in the opening on the woodland trail below, skipping gayly along, with her shawl over her head, Spanish fashion, and a basket of eggs on her arm. The dark-green pines and the fresh brightness of the flowery meadow made the loveliest kind of setting for this sylvan beauty, dark-eyed and brilliant, with the rich, glowing hues of the wild madroño on her rounded cheeks. Nellie remained quiet till she saw George seat himself on a rock as if to wait for Nita's return from the hotel, whither the eggs were most likely to be taken, so *she* did likewise on the other side of the clearing. She found the delay tiresome, bent as she was on seeing the remainder of her amusement; but George, after his brief imprisonment, and being too ill to have any surplus of wicked animation, rather enjoyed sitting on this rock in the sweet-scented wildwood, watching the sun tip with its fading beams of reddish gold the shadowy masses of tall fir and pine, the low, white-crowned bushes of the chaparral, and the mantle of plushy green which lay spread out over all the ground, from which the little crickets were already beginning to make their weird songs. The sun was nearing the horizon out beyond the woods in the west, when Nita came hurrying back from her errand, swinging the empty basket, and at last putting it on her head, and trying to see her way through its open willow-work.

George rose when he saw her coming, and went down by the lower trail, standing behind a hedge of bushes to be in readiness, which gave Nellie an opportunity to cross the open space before Nita could see her. She hid herself at a convenient distance from George, and listened.

When Nita came along he stepped out beside the path, and playfully pushed the basket off her head before she saw him. She gave a wild, shrill scream, like a frightened animal, stood trembling a second, and then sat down on a fallen log, and began to cry.

"Come, come," said George, "don't cry. Don't you see I did n't intend to startle you. I am very sorry," — penitently. "But you are irresistible, and when out on my walk through these lovely groves I accidentally saw you coming down the path, all else lost its beauty; but you see I could not admire you as you passed with that basket over your head, so I was tempted to remove it." She did not reply to this apology, but George seated himself on the other end of the log, and began to gather a little bunch of lilies that grew in the shade beside it.

He looked handsome as an Apollo in the waning light that touched up his features with a stately glory, while his pale face and his dark eyes, large and luminous, lost all their old expression of mocking vanity and selfishness, and seemed sincere and noble.

"Here are a few lilies for you," he said at last. "Nothing is beautiful to me when you are near," offering them to her.

She took them petulantly, and rose as if to end the matter, but she caught sight of his face turned toward

her, so grave and earnest that she relented, and stood twisting the bending stalk of a young fir as if she would part on more friendly terms. George was aware of his advantage immediately, and left his seat also. "Nita," he said, "do not treat me so. All are strangers to me about the mine, and I need the pleasant friendship you could give. Is there any harm in being kind to one another, I wonder? Come now, be even as friendly as you were to the driver last night, and I shall be satisfied."

"Well, I can do that if you really want to treat me nice," said the dark girl, smiling. "I'm willing to be on speaking terms if you ain't trying to make fun out of it, honor bright. Seems to me you're not quite so polite as you ought to be. I'm *sure* you were more free than you should have been last night, and I'm glad I would n't let you have my shawl for it, — there!"

Poor child! How deceived to ask him to tell her truthfully that he did not want amusement in their acquaintance, when it was the only thing he sought!

But he was actually winning this shy beauty who "never noticed," as Milcie had told him, and he was elated with this little victory; for besides, he had to overcome the prejudice which he had already awakened.

"Well, let's forget all differences, anyway," replied George. "Are you going away soon? I heard you and your friend speaking of it last night, you know."

"No. My father says later on, in the summer will be better for me to go, when it will not be so cold in the higher country."

"Good fortune for me," observed the insinuating flatterer.

"I must hurry along," Nita said, blushing and suddenly remembering herself. "Mother's at home all alone."

"May I go part way with you?" said George, meekly.

"O no; I could n't, surely. O no; don't ask me, please."

"Why not?" persistently from George.

"Because I could n't let you." Nita scarcely knew what to say. She could not give him a plain and graceful excuse, but became uneasy, and answered him so excitedly that he could not make up his mind whether she was waiting to be coaxed or really did not want his company. She was nervously tearing off strips of tender bark from the young fir near her, and George was reminded of the honeysuckle vine at Robinson's that had suffered on a like occasion, when he could not by any possibility think she liked his advances. So he said only, "I hope you will get along safely, though I would enjoy this sunset far more, facing it with you, than going homeward and turning my back to all the brightness of my day. Good by."

"Good by," answered Nita, feeling relieved to be rid of his presence, yet going rather reluctantly, and glancing shyly back at him standing by the vine-covered log, seeming handsome and manly in the soft radiance of the western light.

When she was out of sight around a curve in the path, Nellie parted the bushes of her hiding-place and came out. "Good evening, George," she called. "You and I take our walks at the same time, I presume. I thought you had a severe cold. It don't pay to hunt

mischief at this hour, for it's getting chilly, Sir George."

He stood confused, wondering if she had just come. "She listened, I'll wager, if she arrived in time," thought he.

"'Oh, profound meditation! how oft have I—'" quoted Nellie, tragically. "You'll get a worse caress from the ice-maiden than you have now if you stand there sunset-gazing. Come, let us go home. Take my wrap, I'm warm from walking and can do without it," she said, taking off her soft, delicate shawl, and shrugging her trim shoulders as if to keep away the cold.

"O no, thanks; I could n't think of depriving you. I'm well provided for."

"But you are not. Put this around your throat," Nellie insisted; "and come straight back to the hotel," she further ordered; and taking his arm, piloted him off, laughing to herself at her success, and the doubt she had raised in his mind.

Later in the evening Nellie sat in the brilliantly lighted parlor with George, whom she had persuaded to remain up with her to await the arrival of the stage, though he pleaded earnestly the privilege to retire. Although the hour was late, there were many still about, looking anxiously for their mail, the news, or their expected friends.

Nellie glanced at her watch. "If they left that place called Robinson's at eight o'clock, as we did, they ought to be here soon," she said, to encourage the drowsy George to keep awake; but it was unnecessary, for before she had finished speaking there was a commotion outside, the rattle and rumble of wheels, a chorus of excited voices, and the stage had come.

She sent George out to see that her friends were shown into the parlor, where she was waiting, and he returned in a few minutes, followed by Mrs. Willis and Mabel.

Nellie flew to meet them with extravagant words of welcome, and descriptions of her travel and her lonely day. "But Mr. Dennett has been very kind during all of my exile," she added slyly, ignoring the contributions George had made, both involuntarily or with his reluctant consent. However, he knew Nellie too well to expect anything else; and besides, amidst all the noisy chatter and confusion of troublesome packages that Mrs. Willis was constantly losing and finding again, he was enjoying a most comfortable stare at Mabel. Nellie was taking off her wraps, and the two girls were talking freely to each other, while he, half-forgotten, compared the quiet grace and classic beauty of Mabel with the lively and trim Nellie. He was spellbound. Mabel was tired and travel-worn and cold, but she was lovely still, — lovely in every motion, in every word, in every look. And again, how poorly did the uncultured, bashful Nita, with all her wild, dashing beauty and impatient ignorance, compare with this high-born girl, her refinement blended with serene dignity, her light-hearted spirits wedded to dainty little feminine graces and modesty! She was truly beautiful; George thought he had never before beheld one so lovely. The glossy coils of her dark brown hair were woven like a crown upon her head, her oval patrician face had borrowed the pearly crystal whiteness of the snow and the delicate flush of the wild mountain rose; while her eyes, dark hazel, deep, and

lustrous, were shadowy as twilight under the delicately arched brows that relieved the pure whiteness of her forehead.

George Brooklyn was one of those weak, vacillating creatures to whom the last pretty face is always the most beautiful. In a measure he realized it himself, although he was so superficially bright, so adept at making a good appearance while performing an action unworthy of dignified manhood, that he escaped oftener than he deserved hearing the unenviable appellation of "susceptible" applied to himself. He recognized the fact that he had admired a score or more of pretty women in his life, and even imagined he loved a generous few of them, though he knew he had been cured more quickly than story-books relate, and sooner consoled with another love when unkind fortune separated him from the first. However, he thought the authors very likely exaggerated these things for better effect, and besides, he thought it particularly smart and captivating to have a number of such affairs to remember. Only they who are incapable of deep feeling themselves scoff at the misfortunes that befall others through this cause.

Such shallow-minded creatures as these are generally the ones who imagine that they have fallen in love at "first sight." Although "love" seems to be rather an extravagant term when used instead of admiration or fascination, yet this is often the only kind of love of which they are capable. There is none of the respect and esteem, the tenderness and solicitude in it, the sweet, happy remembrances, the delightful dreaminess of past scenes, the strange, clinging spell, the fragrant

blossoming of the affections, that characterize real love. And thus it happened that George Brooklyn truly believed that he had become desperately in love in less than half an hour. Nellie at last thought of introducing him, when it came time for her to send for some one to show the newly arrived guests to their rooms, so he had no opportunity for his oily flattery, or to accommodatingly dance attendance to every suggestion of their wants he could discover. To strangers these ways seemed very acceptable and delightful, yet they varied in the degree of appreciation all the way down to exciting sheer disgust, and appearing consummately silly to those who knew him well.

On this occasion Nellie mentally commented upon his unrelieved anxiety to make himself as conspicuous as he wished to Mabel Willis by this means. "How different it is from Edward's high-bred and native gallantry!" and she tossed her head with pride at the mere thought. "It seems as if Edward performs all these courteous and grateful kindnesses as simply and unobtrusively as breathing; and that such little interruptions never disturb in the least the broader and nobler objects that occupy his mind. But I presume George's mind is essentially different, — and especially as to occupations," she concluded, with an unconscious smile.

After they had gone she paid attention to George, since it was worth her while to give him an idea or two. It was greatly to her own account that he should monopolize Mabel, yet she did not wish to appear too solicitous to throw Mabel in his way, fearing that he would tire if he had an easy victory; and so she put him in the background as much as possible at their first meeting.

"Heigho," she said lazily. "I'm sleepy, and I'm sure you've made a great sacrifice, George, to keep me company when you are more than half ill, anyway. It was very kind. I'll repay you some time in like degree. But then, come to think of it, you should consider a glimpse of a girl like Mabel Willis enough compensation. I should, I know, if I were such an enthusiastic admirer of the fair ones as you are." She meant such a soft Tom Fool about it, for Nellie understood him quite thoroughly; and though unprincipled herself in many things, she still could see the ridiculous folly of promiscuous love-making; and though she liked to flirt, both for amusement and to obtain favors, she still had one virtue in the matter, — her own feelings were seldom touched.

"I have n't suggested reward," returned George. "However, as you say, I'm independent of you, for you did not furnish me with my best enjoyment, — that of seeing, for about ten minutes, from the edifying background of snubdom, a very beautiful young lady."

Nellie laughed two or three long ripples of laughter, and ignoring his reference to her treatment, said, "She *is* almost too pretty a girl to be backed up by a solid fortune, and only one aunt for a relative."

George's eyes sparkled. This was better yet. To such as he, the gratifying spice of money was enough to attract him even away from his beloved hobby, — that of love-making; but both offered in one object seemed like a freak of fortune at least.

"I'd give up half the good luck to be rid of that scheming witch who runs things in such an exasperat-

ing fashion, with stone-faced impudence, for the sake of winning the other half in peace," thought George as he went to rest, listening to the grovelling clamor of his selfish soul instead of the lyric music of the pines tossing in the moaning wind, that told in its unmeasured harmony one thing, if that alone, — the great mystery and the supreme grandeur in the boundless universe of nature's own unsullied loveliness.

# CHAPTER VII.

## A CITY GIRL'S ADVENTURE.

Nothing good bursts forth all at once. The lightning may dart out of a black cloud; but the day sends his bright heralds before him, to prepare the world for his coming. — HARE.

THE good things of life seldom come to us suddenly. The seeds dropped quietly and unobserved into our hearts make for themselves a place amongst our other joys, — they expand, they grow, they flourish, and then they blossom with a fragrance that seems to absorb all our other thoughts, and at last change into the very crown and promise of our being, and we marvel at the desert which we once endured. Alas for those that blight! Alas for those that find a barren soil!

Those things which rouse most deeply the emotions of the heart come not with haste upon us, but by slow gradations that we cannot see, by trifles that we never heed. On the threshold of life that overlooks that broad and untried region stretching out even to the river of death, we pause and wonder. It is all beautiful. Here is a path that leads through mounds of gold, to diadems of jewels, that gives a golden key to every traveller, but it leads — where? Not always to the heavenly mountains, but often to the blank desolation of the desert. Here is one that winds amid the flowers of love, and another that passes through the trees of knowledge, and yet again one descending into the deep valleys and dark cañons that reveal the mys-

teries of nature. Which shall we take? Ah! it needs a purpose sure, a heart sincere, to turn neither to right nor left, to be not allured by broad and flowery ways which guide to marshes foul and endless, but to keep in the plain path marked out by duty, which leads not to the city of discontent, to the country of despair, nor to the land of care and sorrow, but to an old age loitering in that sweet Beulah which borders on the fields of Paradise. And then those good things we knew not of when we started on life's way shall grow upon us, giving a reward that is far better than that which any of the tempting roads we have passed could have bestowed.

And thus it was when Mabel Willis opened her wondering eyes upon the glories of another day, the grand and snowy hills and the long sweeps of forest were a delight to her, just as the great old ocean or the blooming, fertile valleys had been, and nothing more. Surely, this landscape which was brightening under the breaking light of early dawn held more of the old primeval solitude and glory than anything she had ever seen before, and she was enraptured with its beauty; though little did it stir her heart to those feelings which encompass scenes associated with things we love, little did she dream that this awakening was not alone to the light of a new day, but also to the illumination of another path in life for her, which thenceforth she would tread,—one among the piney mountains leading her to life's greatest, sweetest secret, so that ever after she would look upon them as far more dear and beautiful.

The Royal Regina was built upon a hillside, amid stately pine groves, and overlooking the rude little town

nestled below it near the foot of the slope; so that when Mabel cautiously pulled aside the drapery of her window and looked out upon the early day, the upper world of heights and cliffs was all before her, and she saw the east rosy with approaching light, the white dews frosting the grassy surface of the ground, following the descents into the vales, rising again on the steep banks or creeping under gloomy thickets, and a gentle stirring of the morning air in the tasselled branches of the pines. It was but a little after five, and though she was wearied with her journey, the seclusion of her room became unendurable when such untried loveliness remained without. She could not sleep again, so she clothed herself in a thick warm dress and ventured out upon the balcony. The cold air was invigorating, and the breath of the woods floated to her in fresh little puffs of breeze that woke the roses on her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes, while the far-off line of purple summits and snowy peaks that crowded to the east were set in a blaze of gold and crimson, melting to a pale rim of amber in the distant reaches of the dim horizon, and reflecting itself from the sombre west in dainty hues of rose and pearl and violet.

Below, the town lay sleeping, — a queer little town of rough new dwellings with yellow pine roofs and small square windows, with its stores and saloons made conspicuous by a long line of gnawed and crooked hitching-posts, and low cabins hovering in the outskirts and clustering thick across a stream from the great high mill which crowed supreme over the other buildings, with its gilded weathercock perched aloft among the singing evergreens that waved above its

sharp, shiny roof. Beyond the mill and across the roaring creek were huge dumps of red earth and rusty white quartz, odd little buildings and long sheds through the low archways of which huge bands and belts and motionless wheels were partially revealed, and tram-roads tunnelled through high banks, where half-loaded cars stood idle upon the smooth straight rails that shone as if glossed with silver in the pale dawn. Not a sound was heard; not a sign of life save here and there, from rock-built chimney or rusty stove-pipe in the valley below, a thick plume of blue smoke, edged with a soft white bloom, which curved so slowly upward that it seemed to lie motionless on the clear, heavy air, until dissolved in the depths of pale sky above the horizon.

"It would be safe to take a walk in this twilight calm," thought Mabel; "no one would know it, since I could return before the world awakes."

She left the balcony and looked into Aunt Willis's room. All was quiet there except a low breathing proceeding from the bed where a night-capped head was exposed to sight by a ray of light breaking through the closed shutters and falling upon it. Mabel wrote hastily on a card, "Dear Aunt Cynthia, I have gone for a walk and will be back in a few minutes," and placed it inside the mirror frame, knowing it was sure to be seen there; and putting on her overshoes, and a hat and cloak, stole softly down the broad stairs. They seemed to creak and even shriek as she crept along to the wide door in the hall below, and the light that struggled in through the frosted transom seemed to fall upon her alone of all the objects in its path, leaving everything else concealed in dusky twilight.

But once outside in the broad piazza, where the honeysuckles, white and creamy with slender flowers, dewy and wind-kissed with the gifts of morning, threw an incense of delicious fragrance all around her, and the wild Madeira vine made a curtain of transparent green to keep away the breaking gold on the eastern hills, her delight returned, and she fearlessly descended the steps and started off through the glistening grass.

She passed a stable, the doors of which were thrown wide open, and she could see within a long row of horses, where resounding hoofs made continual stamping on the planked floor, and a curious-looking hostler with bushy head and an oilskin cap came out and stared saucily as she went by; while farther on a stout little fellow whistled a few stray bars of a melody sweet as a lark's song, and busily washed the muddy wheels of the great red stages, with a long white hose. He, too, stopped his whistling and his work to look at her, putting his hands on his sides, and gazing in blank surprise at this pretty maiden venturing out alone in the cool daybreak, and even peeking around the corner of the stage, when she passed behind it, for a better look.

Next, a ferocious black dog with red eyes and gleaming teeth set up a wild series of barks, and made desperate efforts to break his chain, as she passed an isolated cabin half hidden in a thicket; and a lean-faced individual with long, lank locks, in an undress of faded brown jean, and blue yarn socks that were wofully short, came hurriedly out, and with threats and a whip decreed silence, telling the growling cur not to terrify the "young leddie," on pain of a beating, and after re-

ceiving Mabel's thanks, made a very elaborate bow and bade her a polite "good morning."

Beyond this were the forests of pine, where little groves of pointed, aspiring saplings were springing up beneath the older trees, and brown mats of fallen needles, collections of mouldy, decaying cones, and dried broken branches, were all overgrown with a luxuriance of high grass and yellowish, velvety mosses.

She chose the path that George had taken the night before, and wandered along, breathlessly drinking in the charmed beauty of the woodland, stopping to gather a frond of silver brake or a cluster of rank, wild maidenhair, or to admire a netted cobweb bespangled with a shower of dew on some gray overhanging rock.

The sun broke through the gateway of eastern peaks at last, and threw a long flood of sunbeams across the kindling forests, tipping each spear-like tree with a torch of fire.

Her way led to the top of a low range of slopes that were heavily clothed with pine and fir and tamarack, and finally to a clearing where a primitive-looking house and out-buildings had been erected. The household was all astir with life, strutting gobblers and prating chickens having desperate times to keep out of the way of the horned invaders of the barn-yard, and a large, well-built, pleasant-looking man and an agile young woman appeared to be very busy among the hungry throng, though taking time now and then for a playful notice of one another.

Mabel turned into a side path to avoid being seen by them, and descended the hill on the other side, coming

suddenly upon a little unfenced garden of cabbages and pease and potatoes, and there her path ended. Turning to go back, she saw the young girl who had been so occupied in the barn-yard but a few minutes before coming down to the little garden along the trail which she was following back. The girl stopped, shaded her eyes with her hand, looked for a moment, and then started along again as if half undecided what to do. On drawing nearer, Mabel saw that she was a magnificently colored creature, with the deep hues of the pomegranate lighting up her clear, dusky skin, with eyes like velvety black pansies and long, glossy dark hair; but yet there was an untamed savage air about her that turned her modesty into an unutterable timidity. Her features were too soft and delicate for an Indian girl, yet there was more dash and spirit and uncurbed passion in her face than Spanish beauties have.

"I must tell her why I came here so she will not think it strange that I am just leaving her garden," thought Mabel, mistaking the girl's hesitation.

"Will you tell me," she asked of Nita, coming closer, "if there is a path that leads to the hotel nearer than the one which goes over that hill beyond us? I came out for a walk, and turning into this side path with the hope that it would take me to a shorter route home, I find it ends in a garden-patch below here."

Nita looked at her rather curiously for a moment, as if doubting a walk at such an extravagantly early hour, but answered very prettily, in a low, musical voice, "Yes, there is one other trail. It runs just below, along that cañon where the trees grow so thick. It is shorter, too. Shall I go and show you?"

"She is improving rapidly in manner on acquaintance," Mabel concluded, though she noticed how nervously the dark girl twisted the folds of her blue wool dress as if to tear them. "If you will be so kind, I shall be very glad."

They walked along side by side, the dainty, well-protected feet of the one, and the rough, heavy shoes of the other, mingling their tracks in trails of bright green through the dew-frosted grass; but Nita was silent, so Mabel finally asked, "You find your home very beautiful, do you not, out here among these lovely mountains?"

"Yes, it is pretty; but nice views do not satisfy me, — I must have something different."

Ah! here was discontent, even in a spot where nature lavished her choicest beauties, from a being that seemed the very outgrowth of the uninvaded wilderness of hills.

"What would you have different? What do you do to amuse yourself?"

"Amuse myself! Why, I am busy from morning till night, with our chickens and our gardens and the cows, and the work in-doors; I'll wager you never saw the likes of it. It's all very well to take nice walks, but you can't always enjoy them when you have to hurry after the cows as I do, or go to the hotel with eggs to sell, — *with eggs!*"

Her last words betrayed so much feeling, such suppressed emotion, that Mabel pitied the bright young creature dissatisfied with the grandeur of her beautiful surroundings, and longing for something else, when this seemed her natural sphere; so she laid a little

gloved hand caressingly on Nita's bare, shapely arm, and asked kindly, "What can *I* do to help you?"

Nita turned her great black eyes upon the gentle-hearted girl, and read her tender meaning in a moment. Instinctively she knew that this was not such an offer of friendship as George had made, and it came to her with a thrill of joy that ended in a passion of grateful tears. She was impulsive and wilful in the gratification of her own feelings. There was no appeal to her reason, no appeal to her sense of duty, nothing but her own impressible, sensitive heart to guide her; and though painfully bashful in her moments of calm, there were times when, forgetful of self, she could stand and defy the whole world in protection of its interests. Mabel had chosen the only path to Nita's heart, when she made this inexperienced little creature *feel* her goodness.

"O, I don't know, I'm sure, what you could do for me," Nita answered; "but it's bitterness to my pride to see the world's favorites feasted and humored with all its plenty, while I, who could enjoy and appreciate as much as they, must wait on them in the lowest service. I have sinned no more against fortune, that she should put me out here among the wilds to do her servile duties, when I hate it all,—I hate it! I love beautiful dresses and laces and jewels, and handsome houses too; and I could fill a grand place, and have a fair face like you, if I had a chance. O, I could be a queen, I know," she almost whispered, speaking more to herself or the winds than to Mabel, in the vanity of her dearest wish.

Mabel knew that envy and pride are both hard mas-

ters. The one allures and tempts, the other holds its victim back by an impassable wall. Here was a girl whose strange impulses had betrayed her into giving confidence to a stranger. However free she might be now, the reaction when pride gave its tyrannical warning would freeze her into marble, and Mabel knew that judicious treatment was the only way to keep what good-will she had already won, or it would change to hatred.

"Well," she said, "we are all given life to use for a purpose, to be a part and sum of that great whole which is mighty in the end. To be favored of earth's material gifts is not always to be most happy, for sorrow's sharpest tooth often bites through armors of solid gold, and the only true wealth is the riches of the heart that is fortified and guarded so deep the world's great rumble and turmoils cannot penetrate to harm it. Your lot is not the hardest. You could make it beautiful, and useful too, with only a drop of sweetening contentment. We are all sisters, you know, and should help each other over the hard places that we have to cross, each in her way. I can do something for you, and perhaps you can do as much for me in another way some time. But let me begin and get you a pretty dress. I can find one somewhere, I 'm sure, that you will like, and that will be one little thing toward making you happier."

Nita's eyes glowed with pleasure, and the melancholy look faded like the mist before the rainbow.

"O yes, from you I would take it, if it is really true that even rich people need help sometimes, and I can be of use to you in return. O, I am so glad! I *love* beautiful dresses! And I have been sadly disap-

pointed. My father once promised me a silk if I would read the histories of England and Ireland, and Moore's and Goldsmith's writings, and stand well in my class for one whole term; I worked, oh, so hard! with the thought of a dark crimson silk as my reward, but I had to give it up, that we might pay for my mother's new crutches. She is lame."

Ah! this study for the sake of her love for pretty things was the secret of this dark girl's language, that was so refined as to be a marvel in one who, though naturally bright and quick, had seen so little of the outside world as to be awkward and unpolished even in spite of her natural grace.

They were now in sight of a few bright roofs of Lucky Streak, rising above the brow of a neighboring hill, for the distance had seemed short to both; so Nita, with a face dimpled in smiles, said she would go back.

"What is your name?" Mabel asked, before they parted.

"Nita Logan."

"Mine is Mabel Willis. I live now at the hotel, and shall have a chance to see you again. Good by, Nita."

"Good by,'" she answered, with a glad, free ring that told of a heart full of happiness.

"How like a child this girl is, to be pleased with a trifle," thought Mabel, as she resumed her way. "She is just one remove from happiness, which she could gain by only feeling satisfied with what she has. Her best ambition is told in a few words."

Little did she know how deep were the secrets in that passionate heart. Only a whisper had been told her of its fanciful longings, and Nita's next act would have

opened Mabel's eyes to a truth that was too deep even for her; for on her homeward way, Nita sought a cherished spot of old decaying logs and mossy rocks, and throwing herself recklessly down in the glittering dew, there in the early sunshine, when nature told all her best and truest secrets to the humblest seeker for them, she drew from its hiding-place that which she kept hidden from the eyes of all the world save one, and watched and guarded religiously through every phase of her monotonous life. It was a little scrap of paper put carefully away in the heart of a hollow log, but it was full of meaning. It told how one John Gloucester and one Nita Logan, on a day fully a year before, had been joined in marriage at a little camp away in the inmost fastnesses of the mountain mines. No one knew of it except the absent husband, who had gone away into another country to earn the gold that would make her vain and foolish soul superlatively happy.

Alas, that she should cast aside a happiness that might have opened into a future grand and noble, for the paltry benefits that gold can buy! Alas, that in those hours, when one heart rises superior to the hollow aims of earth, it finds not a responsive soul!

She kissed the paper tenderly, — this dark-eyed girl, ruled by her vanities and her passions, till her whole self was absorbed in them, — and went her way a-dreaming, heeding not her dew-bedraggled dress in the happiness of her new-found hopes, nor the wild, sweet beauty of the early day.

Not so Mabel. The sunshine threw a maze of shining words over all the landscape, and she read from shadowy bank, from flowery slope, and water-stained

rock-wall. [illegible] the dying [illegible] tales [illegible] breaking [illegible] rugged hills [illegible] giac and melow [illegible]

[illegible] with such a happy [illegible] started on [illegible] friend or some [illegible] length upon [illegible]

Down [illegible] linnet-swinging [illegible] until [illegible] A glad surprise [illegible] sign of [illegible] glanced [illegible] the spot [illegible] we grass upon [illegible] unexpected [illegible] mountain wife. [illegible] goblins and [illegible] dwelling [illegible] and though [illegible] [illegible] politeness. [illegible] features, [illegible] looking down [illegible]

He saw a young girl, graceful and pretty, passing him, a quick blush deepening the rose on her cheek as she bowed her thanks, and an air of quiet elegance in

every motion. She wore a dark blue dress, made very simply, that seemed moulded to a perfect form, while her wrap was folded carelessly over her arm, and a spray of pearly manzanita bells quivered in her hand. A pretty picture she made, with dainty little curls of brown, ruffled and rebellious from the morning breezes, clustering around her full white forehead, and the fresh color on her cheek, melting into her throat of lily fairness; but it was one he did not dare dwell upon, so he went on and put her out of his thoughts. This lovely woman, whose fancy or caprice had led her for a season to this place, was not for him, who was so far removed from her world and life, to think upon, or scarcely to admire.

But Mabel, whose free heart knew not the restraint of circumstances, even turned shyly to watch the retreating manly figure, the sunbeams glinting in golden waves across his hair, and making hasty little dapples on his back as he passed under the shadows and hurried away.

A path turned to the right after she had gone down into a hollow, and she was at a loss which to follow, since no longer the gilded weathercock of the mines glittered above the trees; but the sharp blast of a whistle decided her way, and she turned to the right, whence the sound came.

Quite likely it was the memory of those frank blue eyes that haunted her thoughts and made the way seem short, for she walked along heedlessly until a weathervane appeared again in view, not the one she had seen at Lucky Streak, perched up grand and bold, and crowing fearlessly, but a slender little oar of gold sway-

ing in the wind. A few steps more and she was startled at the sight that met her gaze. Nothing like the town of Lucky Streak was anywhere in sight, but gloomy old buildings, black from age, with riven walls and creaking doors, represented the mill of a long-deserted mine; everything was old and decaying and falling to pieces, while scattered all around were rusty pumps, broken tramways, and battered cars, and mounds of earth over which the grass was beginning to grow and blossom. Yet something bright and new-looking attracted her attention, and there over the wide, heavy doors that had once borne a covering of white paint she read in gilded lettering, "The Golden Deep." She smiled to think how indiscriminately the names of mines were mingled in these mining regions; the romantic, the quaint, the coarse, and the commonplace were nearest neighbors.

But a sound from a little gully below attracted her attention, and she looked to see half a dozen Chinamen, picturesque in faded blue and spattered jean, and little pointed willow hats, at work with placer cradles in a turbid stream.

She shrank back, but one old Mongolian, hideous with moon-shaped eyes, yellow skin, and protruding teeth, looked up and asked, with cross impudence, "What you likee?"

"Which the road to Lucky Streak mines?" Mabel said, trembling with fear.

"Quail Gulch this way, — Lucky Streak you talkee this way," he said, with wild gesticulation, but pointing nowhere, and adding other words she could not understand. And at this juncture two more Celestials left their work and came forward to assist, jabbering loudly,

while Mabel, terrified, turned and fled, whither she knew not, only glancing back to see all the Chinamen collected in a group, excitedly talking, flourishing their arms and shovels about, and looking in the direction whither she had gone as if to pursue her through the lonely mountain wilds.

# CHAPTER [illegible]

## AN AFTERNOON AT [illegible]

There are days and days, — [illegible]

"I declare! I do declare!" [illegible] whose house the school-mistress [illegible] her, Mrs. Platt, who had stopped [illegible]

"You'll not be surprised [illegible] because no doubt you've seen [illegible] think it an entirely new [illegible] to indulge in. Don't you [illegible]

"Think what?" [illegible] that I remember."

"O, then perhaps you [illegible] ceedings. I thought [illegible] with the new doctor [illegible] It's strange that he [illegible] is a country place. [illegible] I guess he is a little [illegible] are good in quiet [illegible] of fevers. Mrs. Platt [illegible] physician, for on [illegible] enough. I should [illegible] of human [illegible] ingenious appearance. [illegible] Dr. Platt will be [illegible] any a [illegible] course. But what I started [illegible]

the cart-riding, — I thought every one had seen that. It 's a dozen times more strange. Lois, — dear girl, I would n't say a word against her for the world, but we all know she has been slightly changed since 'that affair,' — Lois has taken to mending the Doctor's gloves, — on such a short acquaintance, too. What do you think of that?"

"Why, I think it is just like Lois, and not very strange either; for she is very helpful and kind in her way."

"Yes; but such stacks of them, — gloves, you know. It would be nothing if it were only one pair. The other day the Doctor drove up (he calls often on business) and lifted out a bundle from under the cart-seat, which he dropped, — he has such a hurried, fussy way with him I wonder he does n't some time drop himself, — and the paper falling off, he picked up half a dozen pairs of those odd yellow gloves that he wears to drive in. And what do you think Lois did? She just ran out into the piazza, before the whole town, if you please, and said, 'So you *did* bring them, Dr. Knapp.' Just think! the simple girl must have *coaxed* him to bring them. 'I 'm glad I can restore them to usefulness,' she said. 'So the pink rosebush did not do such serious damage, after all, when it tore only one glove, and here are twelve to be made whole by it.' And she actually examined them right out there before anybody going by who wanted to look up, and pronounced them all next to new with slight defects; and then went on at a great rate with quotations about waste, and such things, — just as she always does, you know. Well, I was amused with the whole performance, no less at the Doctor's de-

# AN AFTERNOON AT [illegible]

bit of locust flower, I think it was,—and pinned it on his coat. She said something about a previous mention of button-hole bouquets; it seems they had been talking it over, the simpletons, and I happened to pass through the hall at the moment that she was pinning it on, just to see what she would do; and do you know, she actually kept right on, and told me without looking round at all that she was adorning the Doctor. That was like Lois, only she is getting worse and worse. Don't you think so?"

Yes, Mrs. Platt did think the *story* was growing worse and worse; but she was even glad, for a bright thought came to her mind. Maybe the Doctor and Lois did think something of each other, and she was happy even in the idea. But she wanted to be sure, so she asked if they were noticeably friendly.

"Laws! I should think what I've just told you would prove it. He don't come to see her except on business, but I think these little carryings on a trifle odd, at least. Somehow, they made an impression on each other at the very first,—at least, Lois came home one day and laughed a good deal about a gig that she had seen, till I told her we would all see it if she giggled any more about it. And then she said: 'But there was a very nice, kindly looking man in it,—I wonder who he is? Some stranger in town, of course'; but she never suspected it was the new doctor. And then *he* singled her out pretty quick as the best one to do that work for his patients in the hospital."

"Yes, but Dr. Knapp went to Lois at my suggestion. My aunt, Mrs. Hunman, who lives over in Tenayee, near the hospital, has a granddaughter who undertook

it, but she was too mischievous to be of much use. She is a spoiled child, who always has her own way, and her judgment must have been poor in seclecting the reading-matter that he has to have; so I guess he was rather relieved when one day she took offence because he would n't allow her to whip his horse while she and a friend were out driving, and then she refused to perform her duty. The Doctor afterward arranged it so Nettie could help him a little in the hospital. Lois, I think, is especially adapted for ministrations to the sick, — she is so sympathetic."

"Yes, she is a *dear* girl anyway, nobody knows better than I do how nice she is about the house. I remember when my Jimmie had the measles, and I was worn out trying to take care of him, Lois used to come from school, go right into the kitchen with a big apron on, and when I came down to start dinner, there would be the teakettle a-steaming, and Lois peeling potatoes, and flitting about so quietly that I did n't know she was there at all. That was much better than coming to see what she could do for Jimmie, when of course she could n't do anything, because he did n't want to see anybody but me. It was the best kind of help. And she is always ready now to give up anything to assist me. Why, do you know, I even wait to consult her about things around the house, till sometimes I feel as if she is mistress of it herself, and I have to observe her orders. But then I ought n't to say that either, because she always tries to do everything just exactly to please me.

"Laws! I 'd miss her if she should marry. Things are looking a bit dubious now, though, don't you think

[illegible] What with morning doves and little nosegays, I [illegible] all [illegible] that one [illegible] suspected [illegible] However [illegible] that [illegible] to draw [illegible] a girl [illegible] without [illegible] because, [illegible] about her, [illegible] of [illegible] say anything [illegible] I was just speculating, you know. Mrs. [illegible] wonder about — don't you think?

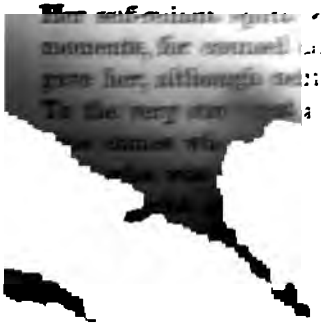
Mrs. Mills [illegible] that kind-hearted, [illegible] truthful and [illegible] gossip so well that she [illegible] her best friends for [illegible] and yet we all have [illegible] a very undesirable [illegible] intentions. However [illegible] that good lady was very [illegible] rolling, and even into Lois's path [illegible] ance; because Mrs. Flav [illegible] sive that there was som [illegible] she had just heard abo [illegible] Mrs. Hunman, which [illegible] warned that well [illegible] and help the [illegible]

power when they are [illegible] quite often the case that the [illegible] Mrs. Emmet [illegible] result.

Quite likely [illegible] thought of telling [illegible] mind was [illegible] her she would [illegible] people can go [illegible] times in their [illegible] thinking how [illegible] lightened [illegible] mind.

Besides the [illegible] when I was [illegible] party while [illegible] Emmet's [illegible] manner [illegible] leaving [illegible] "meaning [illegible]

To [illegible]



so? What with mending gloves and little nosegays, I should say Lois is acting queer. But I have n't told all of it either; there are so many *little* things that one notices that one can't just call to mind. If I had supposed you were going to call, I 'd have thought them up. However, it would n't do any good, because if it 's a fact that she likes the new doctor, we 'll see material enough to draw conclusions from. She 's just the kind of a girl who could do two thirds of the courting herself, without seeming to be at all forward either. It 's because, as Jimmie says, she 's got so much steam about her, that she could n't wait for things to come round of themselves. But then, dear girl, I would n't say anything unkind of her for a diamond. I was just speculating, you know, Mrs. Platt. It is something to wonder about,—don't you think so?"

Mrs. Mills was an excellent illustration of that kind-hearted, appreciative woman who is thoroughly truthful, and in the main charitable, yet who loves to gossip so well that she would not hesitate to sacrifice her best friends for material. Mrs. Mills meant well, surely; and yet we all have heard of a road that leads to a very undesirable place paved with just such things as good intentions. However, she had talked to Mrs. Platt, and that good lady was very discreet. But it set the stone rolling, and even into Lois's path, to cause her annoyance; because Mrs. Platt thought the evidence conclusive that there was something unusual in the conduct she had just heard about, and so on her next visit to Mrs. Hunman, which she managed to make soon, she warned that well-meaning old lady to be considerate, and help the thing along as much as it was in her

power, when they came to her house for dinner, as was quite often the case after the first call. And quaint Mrs. Hunman planned in her own way for the good result.

Quite likely it is unnecessary to say that Lois never thought of falling in love with Dr. Knapp. If she could have known of the conversation going on about her, she would have wondered to find out how far astray people can go from real facts when indulging conjectures on mere trifles. She would have smiled, no doubt, thinking how both she and the Doctor could have enlightened them, little dreaming of his real state of mind.

Besides, the mistake was the more to be wondered at when it was Lois that Mrs. Mills took for the interested party, while the reverse was really the case; and the Doctor's shyness would never have allowed him to manifest his cherished sentiment at all publicly, thus leaving affairs quite in the dark so far as anything with "meaning" could transpire before witnesses.

To Lois this new-found friend was more than welcome. Her self-reliant spirit sometimes longed, in its weary moments, for counsel and shelter such as the Doctor gave her, although neither of them were aware of it. To the very strongest and most dauntless women the time comes when they need a protecting arm. And Lois, who was neither very strong nor dauntless, but only cheerful, ambitious, and brave in her way, found such times came often to her; but she always went on alone, without a thought of encouragement, lest telling her troubles should invite a rude hand to add to her discomfort.

So she unconsciously came to depend greatly on the Doctor, asked his advice, and confided little matters to him without hesitation, because he seemed to fill so perfectly, and yet so unobtrusively, that vacant place which none of her other friends, no matter how willing, could occupy.

If loquacious Mrs. Mills had received her caller later that day, she would have had quite an addition for her story; for while the two ladies were busy talking in the little front parlor, the Doctor called to get Lois to make a certain kind of gruel for one of his patients. He found her in the garden, — it was after school, and she was gathering flowers, — and when he had told his errand, he sauntered about among the evergreens and blooming bushes, while she went to prepare the dish. Presently she put her head out of the kitchen window and startled him with the voice he was thinking of, although he affected to be very busily engaged in training a fallen honeysuckle vine which grew near the back of the house. "Come in, Dr. Knapp," it said, — "into the kitchen; this way, right through the back entrance, if you will. Excuse me for inviting you in here, but I wanted to talk with you about that Mr. Knowles at the hospital, and I thought you would not mind foregoing your enjoyment in the garden for once. Sit down here by the door, Doctor," she said, as she piloted him through the latticed porch and placed a seat for him.

Forego his pleasure in the garden! Who could doubt that he would not when such pleasure as seeing Lois cook was offered him? It was warm and very pleasant in that neat, homelike kitchen, — the painted

floor fairly shone, bright tins dazzled him, the polished sink looked even icy, it was so cool with fresh green things spread about in pans, which might have been lettuce and celery or ribbon-grass and apple leaves for all he knew, but which had a very inviting effect nevertheless. A great stove with shiny copper pots on it steamed away, and a west window shaded from the late sunlight by a graceful pear-tree looked out upon blue skies melting into soft and shadowy green slopes, upon locust groves in the full glory of the blooming season, white with blossoms and dark-clouded by bees, and over at the edge of this window-framed picture, past gothic cottages, bits of bright lawn, long rows of shining roofs, and a glittering church-spire, something that was best of all to the Doctor, because it was associated with Lois, — the little red school-house, dull and gray-roofed, but notwithstanding its lack of beauty, very attractive to him. Within, the trim little school-mistress, radiant in a dark print dress and big white apron, with glossy brown hair brushed back smoothly, yet falling into coquettish little wavelets here and there around her face, made gruel over the stove and talked quite incessantly, only breaking off while the daintily slippered, noiseless feet tripped in and out of the pantry, or sounded like prophetic little taps down the long cellar stairway outside. And the Doctor, — oh, he couldn't think about Knowles, nor talk about Knowles, nor anything else but the present moment; and just sat half-dazed, drinking in the inspiration of the hour, that he would not lose for the slight good he could do to twenty Knowleses in that time.

It had been a long while since the Doctor had been

in a kitchen. There was just a spice of satisfaction in getting in there, after all, aside from his other happiness. Back to an old New England farm-house it carried him, to a time when the snow lay thick and white upon the ground outside, and the windows took on little cloudy patches of steam to mar their clearness, to a big old kitchen, warm, and odorous of the good things that appeared mysteriously on every hand. Pies came from a glimmering oven, and were ranged in ever-increasing rows on a long, clean dresser; and besides, there were turkeys brown and savory, light, sweet loaves turned over in pans to cool, and gingerbread, too, which a little Melville and a little Franklyn, bright-haired and rosy-cheeked boys, longed irresistibly to pick, but dared not for fear of an offended mamma, who would not allow them to eat it hot, and they were wofully unhappy for nearly half an hour, until it cooled, unless wilful little Melville satisfied his mouth at the expense of his conscience, and considerate and obedient little Franklyn shared in the unhoped-for spoils. It made him shudder to think how very long ago that was, — how far behind in the unspeaking, never-returning past his boyhood lay, how changes had come to that dear old home, and its birdlings had flown, — and yet it still remained cherished lovingly in his remembrance through all the drifting years, and his mind ever recurred to it with the same dependent feeling as in his departed youth.

But here was another kitchen, far away from the first one that haunted his memory, under another sky that was blue and soft and tender, in another spring-time that was warm and balmy and flowery, in

another country he had hardly heard of, and where he had never thought to journey; and here was another being who took on the grace and crown of womanhood, so like that ideal loveliness his mother had worn, and here was a repetition of that quiet, joyous spell he had never hoped to feel again.

So, of all the kitchens the Doctor had ever seen, this was only the second which seemed worthy of the name; and of all the lovely women who had crossed his path, this sweet young girl before him, unstudied yet graceful, warm-hearted yet sensible, possessed that power over his life which only his mother had held before her. Yet of course Lois was unlike his mother in most things,—he appreciated her youth as compared with himself and his almost ancient memories,—he felt all the external differences between them; but they were alike in the one thing essential,—each held a never-to-be-forgotten charm for him.

How unconscious was Lois of all this! Little do we dream of it when we tread on the sacred borders of the land that parts a life in twain; little do we know, till that last conclusive retrospect, what careless, thoughtless act of ours was engaging all our mind, when a life's issue was unfolding, silently and inexorably, along our very path,—unheeded and unknown. She went on cheerfully, noticing not the Doctor's abstraction, talking about Knowles, what she thought of him, how much better he was; and making plans about the disposal of her work when she went "home," now that she had fully decided to go during her vacation; and finally fell to discussing the good merits of this form of food or that form, to see if she could arouse some interest, for

she observed that she had to lead the conversation altogether.

The Doctor, who at length realized that he must make some effort to be entertaining, though he dreaded to disturb that sweet, long-lost influence that was over him, instead of answering a question that Lois asked him, tried to introduce a new subject without being aware that it was not time to dismiss the old one.

So when Lois asked, "Is it better for invalids to take warm or cold milk with their gruel?" he never heard a word, but said, "This is an Eden-like climate, Miss Warren, the warm, soft air soothes as well as invigorates."

The effect was electric. Lois dropped her spoon, looked up and saw the Doctor's face a prodigy of expression, and the situation was so comical that she could not repress a laugh. And Mrs. Mills, coming into kitchen at that moment, discovered a most surprising scene, that mystified and yet gratified her, although she felt very sorry Mrs. Platt had already gone, so that she could not relate it immediately. There was an atmosphere of constraint all around; the Doctor looked confused and blank and uncomfortable, and there was Lois just subsiding from her laugh, yet wonder-struck herself, standing in the centre of the room, the meal slipping through her fingers and making little trails and miniature peaks along the floor, the fallen spoon, and the gruel boiling up at a fearful rate, as if to add its mite to the dumb excitement.

Mrs. Mills hurried through and shut the door behind her quite carefully, saying as she went down cellar,—yet what she went there for was more than she could tell,

for she had forgotten her errand to the kitchen, she was so upset,—"I do declare! I believe the Doctor's going daft. He sits there with such an idiotic look on his face that I really believe Lois is *asking him* already. That looked very much like the critical moment, I 'm sure. I wonder how they 'll come out of that scene I caught a glimpse of."

But it was for Mrs. Mills herself to help them out. She turned quickly and started upstairs, thinking it best to be nigh if the Doctor should need any one of "tact" to help him along, and that it was well to be within a convenient distance anyway.

Not a word had been spoken in the kitchen since Mrs. Mills passed through. Lois and the Doctor had both nearly recovered, being relieved by this trifling circumstance, and Lois was just bending to pick up the spoon, when a dull noise sounded outside, muffled and yet awful in its subdued thunder, and then came a scream, sharp and long and loud, that was full of agonizing pain and terror.

"Are you sure it was no one who lives in the vicinity? Did you take a good look at her?"

"Was n't likely to do anything else in a hurry while *that* girl was going by. Ask Grant, likely he 'd know where she was going. I saw him speaking with her when his dog got on a tear."

Yes, Old Grant had seen a "young leddie" dressed in blue, but "being as he was in rather questionable costume, he did n't remain out long, and consequently could n't say what direction she took."

That was the last information they could get. The hours wore along till nine and ten, and though Mrs. Willis felt anxious to keep the matter as still as possible, at last she was persuaded to raise a general alarm, and a little party of men from Lucky Streak started out to search the woods. Long were the hours of terrible suspense. Mrs. Willis paced the floor of her room, stopping each moment to look out of the window for the absent one, calling her tender names, and vowing if ever she got her "treasure" back, that nevermore would her own selfish, arbitrary rule deprive Mabel of the pleasure of a little freedom. Eleven o'clock, and still no tidings, still no slender, girlish form coming up the red-brown road toward the hotel, still the dull flutter of excitement about it down in the town below.

At last the noon whistle sounded loud and sharp, echoed off among the distant heights, and then the noise of the heavy machinery grinding and buzzing, the shouts of workmen, and the whizzing of belts were hushed. Parties of miners issued from numerous buildings, making their way in a steady stream to the long boarding-houses across the creek; and at last Nellie,

who watched at the window, saw the young manager come out with brisk step and walk hurriedly toward the hotel. She ran down to meet him in the hall below, asking eagerly for any news of her lost friend.

"I have none," he answered. "I came here to see if I could render any aid in the matter. You see the arrival last evening of my new force of miners made it imperative for me to attend very steadily to my work all the forenoon, though I assure you my sympathies were with you in your misfortune; I was almost powerless to give it any attention, though I would have been glad to do so were it possible."

"O yes, I know, — Edward," looking up with troubled eyes; "and yet I felt so utterly alone in the care of poor Mrs. Willis, half crazed with anxiety, that I was tempted once or twice to send for you to advise me, but I hesitated, fearing it would disturb you. Neither she nor I can direct any one what to do, we are so anxious and confused, and we have had to leave it all to strangers."

Edward passed his hand across his forehead as if thinking deeply. "Most certainly," he said aloud, "it is a serious thing, and a strange one as well." Then another pause, as if he was trying to solve some question, and again he spoke, "A few Chinamen at work on the stream that flows past the Golden Deep, our neighboring mine, had better be watched. They are very ugly toward every one except their own race. As soon as I heard of this matter I despatched a couple of men to the place to investigate. They returned with the report that, save the absence of two, all things seemed to be moving on quietly, but they would give

no information, fearing the men had come to secretly look at their diggings, and hence would not permit them to remain there. I mention this to you, thinking perhaps it would be best for you to know as much as that, in the event it would be necessary for you to cause a more complete investigation; and the hint might be of some consequence to prevent delay that would be caused were it left to me while I am so occupied with work."

"Oh! oh!" cried Nellie in fear. "Just think of falling into the hands of those terrible creatures! Can't something be done immediately?"

"Yes; I am intending to go over in that direction myself, and will see to this too," and he instinctively gave a glance toward the mill, as if fearing to leave its management for even an hour in the hands of another.

"Oh, good!" Nellie exclaimed; "I am greatly relieved that you feel so much interest. You will come and tell us the result, won't you, whether favorable or not? I shall be in great suspense until you return."

"Certainly, I will come to you the first," replied Edward, as he lifted his hat and started away.

Meantime Mabel had been enduring one of the hardest experiences of her life. After her fright at the Chinese diggings, she ran a long way, looking back quickly now and then at the terrible Mongolian that followed her, who, wishing to frighten all intruders away from the jealously guarded claim, knew this method would prevent another call from their late visitor. She went over hills and through hollows as fast as her swift feet could run, till completely exhausted at last she sank down to the earth, her lungs

almost bleeding for want of breath. But her Chinese horror had ceased his pursuit when she looked for him, so with a sigh of relief she remained for another moment's rest, pressing her fair cheek close to the damp brown earth for a touch of its coolness. When she rose to look around her, nothing was visible that looked familiar to her eyes,—not a hill nor a grove like those around Lucky Streak, and she scarcely knew the direction whence she came. But with a desperate unrest she started out to find her way homeward if she could. She feared to venture anywhere lest she should come upon another or the same group of Chinamen; so for hours she wandered cautiously over the hills and through the pine woods with scarcely a hope of finding even a trail. The sun was growing warm, and the dews had long since melted away into the spongy grass roots, and a sense of severe lassitude came creeping over her, compelling her to sit down for a rest on an old log in a little valley. "Oh, how will Aunt Cynthia feel about this!" she sobbed, yielding at last to the tears she had striven to keep back. "There is perhaps no hope of ever getting out of this terrible wilderness, for I shall surely be discovered by some fearful creature before Aunt Cynthia can send any one to find me," she said aloud, in her distress.

"Goodness!" said a woman's voice close behind her.

She started and uttered a terrified cry. Her fear had distorted all objects about her; tall stumps were changed to priests in sombre robes, rough branches to hideous faces leering down upon her, and tramps lurked in the bird-haunted thickets, till at last this spoken word seemed to come from supernatural and evil sources to

do her harm. But she looked and saw a woman standing and looking at her in wonder. "What is the matter, miss?" said the woman at last.

"I have lost my way to Lucky Streak, and have wandered about through the woods since early morning in the hope of finding a path that would lead me right."

"Laws! That 's too bad. Come and I will tell Mrs. Dennett, who lives just over the hill there."

"But could n't you direct me?" asked Mabel, fearing to be led into more disagreeable experiences.

"Yes," replied the woman, "if you prefer it. But you look very tired and quite worn out. Mrs. Dennett lives just beyond that grove. She quite likely will do something to refresh you, and send some one with you to the Mines."

Mabel yielded, and on reaching the top of the hill, they looked down into a fertile little valley luxuriant with bloom and teeming with life. An old white house with a gable roof half hid itself under a burden of roses, — Baltimores, Bleeding Hearts, Castilian Beauties, and Cloth-of-Gold roses dropped their leaves like a shower from the blossom-freighted breezes of the Nile.

In the very precincts of this lovely home she had sank, overpowered with a sense of her solitude and helplessness.

A lady past the middle of life, with a pleasant, reposeful countenance, hair that had once been golden but now divided its brightness with strands of silver, brushed back smoothly from a fair, intelligent brow, sat sewing in the cool, shaded porch, and looked up with such a welcoming smile that she won Mabel's heart at once.

"Mrs. Dennett, here is a young lady who has got lost trying to find her way to Lucky Streak," said the woman.

"Lost," echoed Mrs. Dennett, "no wonder, — in these unfrequented hills. Sit down, please," she said, offering Mabel a low rocker. "Did you come from the Mines?"

"Yes. I ventured out from the hotel early this morning for a walk, the mountains were so beautiful here, but I missed my way, and have wandered about ever since in the hope of finding a road back. I fear my friends are greatly alarmed."

"You have been out since early morning!" exclaimed Mrs. Dennett, rising. "Then you must not attempt to go back until I have given you something to eat. Huldah will go to Lucky Streak with word that you are safe, and you must remain here until you are rested enough to attempt to go yourself. Why, my poor child!" she said, compassionately bending over the weeping girl, "you have suffered, I am sure." This sudden relief had come so gratefully that Mabel could not repress the tears that came rolling into her great innocent dark eyes like a rushing flood.

Huldah hurried off after inquiring the name of Mabel's aunt, and the two were left alone together.

"Come into the dining-room," said Mrs. Dennett, "and I will give you some tea to revive you until I can finish preparing the luncheon."

She led the way into a large room, long and low, where a neat tea-table was spread for two as if the meal had been already begun. It was a homelike room, — a charming one, Mabel thought from a seat by a west

window, where an Æolian harp made sweet music in the gusty breeze that came whistling down from the pines on the hill, and stirred the little curls on her fevered forehead with a gentle, reviving touch; a carpet of soft crimson threw a pink reflection on the white mouldings of the embellished walls and the low ceiling, the heavy folds of a dark curtain in an alcove window half hid a bank of silver-back ferns and fragrant hyacinths, while over in one end of the great room, which seemed used for a library, stood two immense book-cases, showing through their glass doors heavy vellum-bound books, crisp little volumes of red morocco and gilt, ponderous series of histories, and treatises on minerals, and even rich stores of romance and poetry. Near the book-cases was a cabinet of ores arranged in glittering rows along the shelves; and maps and charts and diagrams lay about on the long library table, in the centre of which was a huge antique lamp of lacy gold.

"I am something of an invalid," Mrs. Dennett explained, bringing in the tea and a slice of toast. "And I live here with my girl Huldah, and my boy Jacob who does the garden-work, quite alone, although the lumber-mills are just below on the creek, where a little settlement has opened with several pleasant homes. An old mine called the Golden Deep once created a sensation in this vicinity, and an enterprising village was the outgrowth of its success; but it failed, and the town was abandoned; however, together with a few old settlers and neighbors, I have clung to the spot, loth to leave its beauty and quiet, until good fortune has again come to us, and the new mines have attracted the out-

stretching arm of civilization with their richness, while the old deserted town has sprung up again into a rough new one on its suburbs. We are but two miles from Lucky Streak, and our most direct road to the town leads through the deserted ruins of the old mines, — piles of brick, tumble-down houses, and even a leaning church, with its little cemetery about it overgrown with long-leaved, drooping willows, that touches the heart with its sadness and desolation. Did you come through the old town?"

"I scarcely think so. A crumbling mill called the Golden Deep was on my way, but I became so frightened at the Chinese workmen there that I ran for a long distance into the woods, although when I at first took the wrong path, a whistle from that direction misguided me."

"It must have been the whistle from the Quail Gulch works that have lately renewed operations. Our mines are quite numerous on this belt through the mountains, though out beyond the Golden Deep, where you probably were lost, there is no habitation, nor scarcely a sign of life for miles, except, over on the edge of the forest, the little home of a man named Logan, who works in the Lucky Streak claim."

Mrs. Dennett had seated herself near Mabel during this conversation, talking very smoothly and pleasantly to interest her, yet avoiding questions with true womanly feeling. Finally she leaned back and looked at Mabel for a moment as she sat pale and weary in the great crimson-cushioned chair by the window. "I like to see you there," she said, half dreamily, as if even thinking to herself. "It reminds me of a little friend I had

once, who used to come here and stay for long visits with me. She would sit in that chair where you are now, and sew and talk with me, and read sometimes, till I came to love her as a daughter. She was a sweet-minded girl, and very ambitious, so I took great pains to teach her. Many an afternoon, in a spring like this, we have sat here and read, and planned together for her future, until it seemed to me as if it ought to last always, and my loss was almost inconsolable when she went away. She was with me so much from her early childhood, that many things and places in this old house are inseparably associated with her. She was by nature so refined and reflective that I had an apt pupil, though the family who adopted her were altogether another order of beings in the matter of good taste and natural fine fibre, but she was so uncommonly affectionate that she loved them all dearly, and had enough to spare for me besides. I have not seen her for years; she has been away teaching, and has never returned since she left. Somehow when I saw you coming up the garden with Huldah I was so vividly reminded of her, that I could scarcely believe it was not she, although she was much smaller than you in stature. It has been a long time since that old chair has been occupied by a young girl, and it recalls my days with Lois. The chair has fallen into my exclusive use, although it was originally intended for my son, who is seldom at home since the mines opened. Have you visited the mines yet?"

"Not yet. I only arrived last evening."

"Oh! then you have something in store for the future. Although I have only been down in the mines twice myself, I count it one of the greatest treats in the

way of a novel and interesting experience, and could repeat the visit half a dozen times without being wearied. The workings have not reached a great depth yet. Later on I suppose it will be possible to go a long way under the earth. Now I must attend to my luncheon," she said, leaving her seat and going toward the table. "It is so seldom that I have to do without Huldah that I had almost forgotten it. My son is expected to come to-day for the noon meal. He seldom finds time, though it is only a short ride on horseback, for his work keeps him so busy that he cannot leave it"; and then she went out of the room, and left Mabel alone to marvel at this refined and elegant lady, possessing all the culture and tact of one who mingled every day with educated associates, surrounded by modest little touches of splendor in her dwelling, living among books and the beauties of art, having no other thoughts than of the lovely things in life around her, and hiding herself in these isolated fastnesses of the mountains.

And then she fell to thinking pleasantly of Mrs. Dennett's blue eyes. They were beautiful in themselves, to begin with, but they had, besides, a soft light, a lustrous frankness, that spoke of a mind beneath free and lovely as were these, — its clear outlets; she had a charming way of looking thoughtfully downward, and as some sudden thought flashed through her mind, of glancing up again so brightly that the change in her face seemed like the sunrise over a dusky scene. Mabel wondered how many more in these surprising hills would have such eyes, for this was the second pair she had fallen in love with on a day that had so far proved very lonely.

Beware, Mabel! Dream not of eyes, for Cupid's arrows often speed with burning victories from even soft and tender eyes of blue.

But a brisk step along the hall roused her from her fancies, and in a moment a stranger was in the room, — no, not a stranger either, for had she not seen him waiting gallantly in the wet grass for her this very morning? And here he was again, standing before her and looking down upon her, worn and ruffled and pale in the crimson chair, with those same earnest blue eyes, — eyes with the soft light in them like his mother's, but darker and brighter and clearer, with the fires of youth smouldering in their shining depths. No wonder, then, that a heart fluttered, and long, dark lashes swept a fair, round cheek under the eyes that held such a magic charm, for he looked quite steadily for a moment without a word; and just as he was about to speak, his mother came in, and greeted him with a warm, hearty kiss. "Edward, my dear," she said, "see what I have found,"—half playfully. "This young girl has lost her way."

"And I have found her, too, for which I am very thankful. She has some very anxious friends who await the earliest news, and half the town —"

"Edward," said Mrs. Dennett, warningly, "you must not say anything exciting, for see how pale and exhausted she is from her fright."

But Mrs. Dennett should not have made the mistake of calling attention to the color of any cheeks whatsoever, when anybody else with such magical eyes was around, for Mabel's pale cheeks had already lighted up with the beauty of a brilliant sea-shell, and only

took on a deeper, lovelier hue at this reference to them.

They both saw it, and said no more, Edward remarking that since it had been agreed to fire a gun if Miss Willis should be found, he would go out and discharge a rifle which he had brought with him for that purpose.

Mabel followed him out into the porch with eager questions about her aunt, and if she could not immediately return to the Mines, while he assured her that his signal would be sufficient to satisfy them till she could comfortably go, and then went out with the gun over his shoulder, fired twice in rapid succession, loaded and fired again and again, till the surrounding forests echoed deep and hollow with long, rolling reverberations that seemed heralds of an approaching gladness. Mabel watched him from the porch with the interest of a child, as the swift spurts of fire left the gun, and the loud report burst out with startling sound.

Mrs. Dennett saw her watching him from the vine-wreathed door, and a thrill of pride came to her warm mother's heart that was not too narrow to open for even the stranger also.

"I almost love that sweet girl already," she thought, fondly. "She is not like Lois, either; not so lively and full of energy, but more gentle and confiding, with a very lovely face. Ah me! why was I not blessed with a daughter too!"

At a bright little tea-table that day, where lunch was spread for three, one heart — and not the heart of youth and hopefulness, but one from which the fervent desires of life had faded — felt something like the

prophecy of a blissful future time that was awakened by this little gathering. How happy she would be when three should sit at this cheerful board and call it, with tender, hopeful devotion, our dear home; when a daughter's thoughtful face would beam in response to the love in her own; when faithful ties of affection should entwine themselves about her new-found loved one, and her longing heart would at last find the treasure it had ever missed! She liked to think of it, and know that only they three were there to share the suggestive little picture; and oh, how she did wish Edward would think of it too! But she marked the reserve in his face, the quiet reverence that betrayed not one ardent hope, and she knew that her thoughts had not been his.

At the door when they parted, and Mabel extended her hand with an air of affectionate gratitude, Mrs. Dennett could not resist giving her a warm, loving kiss, and saying earnestly, "You will come to see me again some time, will you not?" And Mabel returned her sign of friendship heartily, and promised to come with even eager readiness, so that each felt that she had won another friend.

And then followed for Mabel a ride that was full of little pleasantries and beauties, of penitent regrets and anxious wishes, but through it all a sense of protection from her strong, manly friend that was very pleasant to remember.

She rode his horse, while he walked on beside her, talking of the mines and the mountains, and finally the old camp with its decaying ruins and reminiscences of its palmy days in the fifties; and at last the view of the

welcome town with its noisy mill, its rough homes, and its great hotel sunning itself majestically from a hill-side, opened out before them.

Nellie Minton, who had detained Huldah that she might have assistance in sending for Mabel, caught sight of them coming up the drive in front of the hotel. "Well," she said, emphatically, "that's a high note! My innocent friend is as full of arts and schemes as even — even I myself," with a satisfied shrug and a meaning smile.

## CHAPTER X.

### SUPERINTENDENT SEVENOAKES OF THE LUCKY STREAK.

**Though they know that the flatterer knows the falsehood of his own flatteries, yet they love the impostor, and with both arms hug the abuse. — SOUTH.**

MR. SEVENOAKES sat in his little office, tilted back in a high-armed chair, with the Mineralogical Report under his nose, which just at that moment walled the whole of his world into a very narrow horizon. However, he liked it and felt quite satisfied. He was not averse to having a world of which he was the centre and the motive power. So he swung his polished boots up on the polished stove, and with a smile breaking out irresistibly and unconsciously all over his face, he read it again, — a delicious little paragraph interlarded quite unsparingly with references to "Supt. Sevenoakes of the Lucky Streak," to his "able management," his "enormously increased force of miners," and the "steady flow of wealth from those fabulously rich mines."

He was a sleek little fellow, with a sleek little tongue and a sleek little mind. He was not young. That small, round, bullet head of his was crowned with a growth of very glossy dark hair, sprinkled even generously with glinting flecks of silver, and his well-trimmed mustache yielded its tawny brownness to here and there a lighter thread; yet his clean-shaven face was fair and

full, and his keen, bright eye had a sparkle that did not by any means betoken age. He was immaculate in his dress; a fine suit of black fitted without a wrinkle his dapper little form, helped nevertheless by the skill of the tailor, and his finely engraved, massive cuff-buttons shone without a flaw on his spotless linen. There was something charmingly fresh about his dress, something soothingly breezy in his manner. And yet everything was on so small a scale that he made one feel as if he might have been rather a fine-appearing specimen of mankind if there had only been enough of him. He had a voice that was light, but pleasant and smooth in tone, and all his motions were quick and easy, yet not hurried, thus preserving a certain degree of dignity that was very becoming, and still did not deprive him of his sleek-tongued sociability or agreeableness. He was like a shuttle,—he slipped around very smoothly and easily, until the limit of his free movement was reached; then he was immovable as the cold, unfeeling steel when it reaches the end of its race,—immovable except to go back over its accustomed track.

But something about his clear gray eyes damaged his genial and conciliatory expression by a shade. It was not their steely color, nor the unusual amount of pearly white, that made them slightly noticeable. It was a cold hardness in their metallic stare that made them rather like lustreless buttons,—absorbing all the light within their reach, and letting out no ray of the luminous soul within.

His office, too, was on a small scale. It was an elegant little place, with a brightly dyed carpet and a varnished desk. No scratch or mar impaired the gloss

of its costly cabinets, no trace of dust or tarnish rested on his burnished inkstands or his polished brass clock. This same little clock was something like its little owner. It was small and bright, with a quick, pleasant tick and a tinkling little stroke, with a regularity surprising in so small and dainty a machine, and with a pretence at richness that showed rather a cheap, superficial brilliancy than solid worth. The windows of the office were small and of the clearest crystal, shaded by pale-green paper curtains with a golden border, that shut out the broad view of the mines and the mill below, and the long sweep of wooded hills and mountains stretching far away to the western horizon.

The only thing of massive proportions in the room was the great iron safe, which bore a crest of polished brass in the shape of a flying phœnix which reached nearly to the ceiling. Its close-shut doors looked even rusty in the midst of all this glistening newness; yet its brassy knobs were bright enough, as if a constant use had worn away their misty marks of age.

Outside, the office was rather a neat, pretentious building, painted up to a high degree of stylishness, with a coat of olive-green and deep cardinal trimmings, while over the door stood out the bold, black letters: "Superintendent's Office."

On this particular morning, when the worthy little Sevenoakes opened his mail of the previous evening, and struck the highly colored article about the Lucky Streak, he plunged into one of his pleasantest moods, and sat with his little turned-up nose tilted skyward so uncommonly far that it almost pointed over the back of his head, a bland smile disclosing his full, *even set of* very white teeth.

His solitude was disturbed after a time by a quick step along the porch, and the opening of the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Dennett," said the sleek little man airly, pushing a chair toward the visitor with his foot. "Nice morning; not too cold. Work booming?"

"Work is going on steadily," replied the other, taking the offered seat.

"Anything I can do for you?" inquired Mr. Sevenoakes, pleasantly.

"Not much. I just stepped in to tell you that I can dispense with Logan's efforts as assayer this week. Our new man is sufficiently recovered from his illness to go on to work, and will be in shortly for some little agreement he thinks necessary before beginning."

"O, very well. You are relieved, I have no doubt."

"Very much. There is considerable loss in any careless handling of ores."

"Just so. Keep up the steam, Dennett; don't let them lose their hold on the present rich pull," directed Mr. Sevenoakes. "O, by the way, let me show you something good," said he, growing confidential as the young manager turned toward the door. "What do you think of that?" presenting his Mineralogical Report, and pointing out the article that had put his spirits into such excellent trim.

Edward resumed his seat, and read the paragraph with interest, while Mr. Sevenoakes watched anxiously for his first words.

"That is excellent praise," said the young man warmly, handing back the paper, and with his honest blue eyes meeting the searching glances of the steel-gray pair.

"Is n't that good, now? That will assist business by sending plenty of help here, and we can work more cheaply, if nothing else, — more independently, too," with a sly, quick twinkle of his eye. "Somebody did us a good turn," he added, suggestively, after a pause, reading critically the fair, earnest face of the young man before him.

"Yes," Edward replied with a short laugh, knowing that Mr. Sevenoakes appreciated fully the mention of himself. "We are not quite forgotten by the civilized world, up here in the Mines. Some one remembered a little more than that we are here."

"O, bless you, yes; of course not forgotten. But there are so few who are willing to give us our due. They are jealous, sir, —jealous," with a satisfied chuckle. "Our good luck does n't suit everybody, by any means."

The little shuttle had run its length, and could now no longer move about easily. He had satisfied himself that Edward on his late visit to the city had not given this favorable report of "Supt. Sevenoakes," and that was all he wanted to know; so now the sooner that young man went about his business the better, — which the young man did immediately, without waiting to find it out.

In the course of half an hour Mr. Sevenoakes had another visitor, Mr. George Brooklyn. This young man's entrance was somewhat different from his first caller's, rather slower, and seemingly lacking in purpose.

The little man was busily engaged, so the effect of the flattery in his choice paragraph had somewhat worn off, and he was slightly less agreeable; but he

received Mr. Brooklyn's credentials and letters of introduction politely, and sat in silence for a few minutes while he examined them, the young man regarding the proceeding with stoical indifference, as if determined to exact his price at any cost. Finally, the visitor espied the Report, and picked it up to glance over its contents while waiting. Becoming interested in the account of the Lucky Streak's success, he made a remark about the paper, as Mr. Sevenoakes looked up and with some commonplace about the weather prepared to get out his writing materials. "I did n't expect to see this paper here," said George; "it has but a small circulation in this part of the mining country. The proprietors are rather too particular about the reliability of their reports, and seldom print much to interest their distant readers, for that reason. I know something about the inside workings of this journal myself."

Mr. Sevenoakes was all interest at once. "Do you, indeed?" he replied, giving his chair a nearer hitch. "Are you a correspondent to its columns?"

"Not exactly," replied George. He detested questioning, and always strove to evade it. "Sometimes when in the city, if I happen to pick up some good information,—vouched for,—I send it around, and they are glad to get it; I seldom do that sort of thing when I 'm engaged in business myself,—I have not the time to bother, generally."

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed the little Sevenoakes. "But that 's a remarkably good power to have. You sometimes give reports from mines which you have never seen, I presume."

George saw through his weakness at once, — that he was likely to want to find out about that report of the Lucky Streak, and he was ready with his answer.

"Yes; that is generally the case when my information is direct." Then he added, for better effect, "Likely enough there will be several articles coming along soon for which I furnished the substance before I left the city. They usually fix up several pretty good ones out of a long talk on the different mines."

"Is this one of yours?" asked the superintendent, pointing to the article in the Report.

George took the paper as if he had not seen the article before, and replied slowly, "I could n't exactly say. I don't always recognize my own stuff. Quite likely it is, though; we talked of the Lucky Streak." He knew very well that in his short talk with an *attache* of the Report he had not furnished any items in praise of Mr. Sevenoakes, but had merely incidentally mentioned the name of his mine. He had not even taken pains to inquire very much about the mine itself of Edward Dennett while in the city, much less the presiding worthy's name, but he was perfectly willing to take the credit of having bestowed all this praise which pleased Mr. Sevenoakes so exceedingly.

And the little man was satisfied about it now. "This is rather a fair kind of a young man to have around, — one who takes an interest from the first," he thought, as he prepared to write out their agreement.

"Mr. Dennett, who called in a moment this morning, mentioned that you wished to make some stipulation or other before entering into our regular contract," he said at last, resolving to arrange things as pleasantly

as possible for an employee who showed such a good spirit.

"Yes," replied George. "It is this, — which I must insist upon, — I think I understand my work sufficiently well to get along without making any serious blunders, and I must stipulate to have entire control of my own department. Are these terms inconsistent with your regulations?"

"O, certainly not, if you desire it. Certainly not," and Mr. Sevenoakes went about drawing up the agreement with self-congratulations that he had got off so easily. When he had finished, he passed it over with a pleasant remark, and reached for his glossy beaver, that he might walk over to the mill with his new employee. As George arose, Mr. Sevenoakes noticed a certain fine grace about him, and an expression of quick appreciation in his face. He was a good-looking young man, and one capable of being rather companionable, Mr. Sevenoakes thought, so he offered a cigar, and the two strolled off talking quite freely together. When they parted, George's mental verdict was that this little Mr. Sevenoakes would be a man worth his while to cultivate; and Mr. Sevenoakes's verdict was that George would be excellent company sometimes, besides being useful in matters outside of his regular line of duty, — and both were pleased.

## CHAPTER XI.

### IN THE GLOAMING.

When evening shadows tinge the sky—
  How sweet the balm which home can yield;
The charm of woman's love-lit eye
  Makes strong the arm that is her shield.
*Selected.*

To Edward Dennett, those prosperous days at Lucky Streak brought rare good fortune in his worldly affairs, but he was still impatient for the fruition of his most dearly cherished hopes. Reared from childhood among the majestic mountains, which marked the springing of his boyish aspirations, which stood by solemnly and relentlessly and saw them wither and decay, which preached sermons to him of patience and renewed strength from their strong, everlasting hearts of gold, the time seemed like a great unsparing scythe, that had gleaned many a promising flower and left but few to blossom.

Among his earliest recollections was that of the little country school at the old town, and the remembrance always brought back thoughts of a score of little barefoot boys who ranged themselves in rows of all sizes along the blackboard and roused the slumbering clouds of chalky dust; of the master thundering out his rules with deep, impatient tones; of disgraced culprits when the loud-voiced "snapper" popped off under some innocent iron-shod heel; of recess time, when the little

girls in calico aprons, and the little boys in gingham jumpers, made fearless merriment with their sleds up and down the grassy hillsides; and of the well-remembered pathway home from school along the borders of a vine-embellished stream. Ah! surely, those were old, old times, when the southern mines were in their glory, and the pioneers were in their prime. Full many a pick that glistened in the ledges then had rusted back to earth; full many a hand that guided its unerring stroke now mouldered in the blooming sods. Yet the survivors of those days looked back through the long aisles of the past to their hopeful youth, and saw its visions rise before them stained by a deeper glory for their distance. Memories they had of cities that flourished with a star-wreathed future, which trembled and sank in the crashing years that followed; those wild hills had known the tramp of many feet, had echoed many a shout with their serene and voiceless summits from tongues that nevermore would sing the old camp-songs, or tell the stories of the past around the hearth of home. From the wild cañons of the Stanislaus, from the rock-walled barriers of the swift Tuolumne, from many a creek half hidden in its stony channels, from the glittering quartz ledge on the mountain-side, rose up the relics of their coming, to touch the heart with a shadow of its sadness. On many a pine-covered hill, deep filled with fallen needles and the crumbling earth, old prospect-holes told histories of the eager hearts that once throbbed there; on many a river bank the mouldering flume and the broken water-wheel still kept the stains of their turbid tides to attest their by-gone use. Far from the haunts of camp and town,

deep in the tree-grown centres of the hills, where the still wildness broke on the spirit in whispers of the old primeval solitude, there stood the falling cabin with its rock-built chimney crumbling to the earth, which once had served to shelter man, in the mad pursuit of golden phantoms, where man had never seemed to tread.

Those were palmy days in this fever-heated country when the miner, strong and brown, glorious in his mud-besprinkled garb and his wide slouch hat, with his bare arm dripping, fresh from the red-soiled bosom of the mine, stood king over all these endless streams that bore his tribute under their shining flood, over all these gold-emblazoned roads that poured their dust into his long, deep sack of treasure. Life then went in by a ringing, reckless shout of jubilee, in a maddening drunkenness of desperate hope. From the tribune of the rock heap, by the sceptre of the spade, went forth the mandates of the impatient kings; down from their dusty palaces of stone and earth, out from the regal courts by the pillared blazes of their reddening fires, swept the swift penalties of broken laws. And yet in all this turmoil from their swift-winged justice, under all this quenchless thirst for gain, deep in the strong foundations of the heart slumbered the seeds of peace and order. All honor to the pioneer, he of the strong and iron sinew, he of the true and dauntless heart, who faced the dangers of the wild Far West, who in those useless pits that scar the face of our fair land planted the rootlets of a mighty state, who stood by manfully and watched them flourish, who told the praises of the proud tree with a dewy eye, and who to-day, as his reward, sees its golden fruit borne afar on the seas of distant lands that bow in homage to its glory.

Even Edward well remembered the day in the subsidence of the mining flush, when the gloomy report went about the old town of the close of the Golden Deep; well did he recollect that night when the furnace fires went out for the last time, when the sun went down after a lingering, sad caress from its troop of reddening sunbeams, on the little doomed camp high up in the heart of the lonesome hills, and the men went home with regretful looks toward the broad doors that would not swing open to admit them on the morrow. And after that the old town was slowly deserted, year by year going to destruction and decay. The winter rains blew through the widening crevices and stained the white walls of many a cosey home; the school-boys pelted with their showers of stones the dusty window panes, until they changed to black and gaping holes; while from all around, from the still, cold, snowy summits, from the dark mystery of the woods, from the soft bleakness of the lower hills, crept on the old-time quiet, and the strange, sweet wildness, to make this spot a part of nature's unmolested primeval again.

There were dark times for the few little hearts that still struggled on in the deserted town. Edward remembered his own in those days, now he in the rosy summer twilight would, of a night, hear sounds and sights that were not, would hear from the window the sighing of the pines, and the sorrowful wail of the coyote in the mining ruins. [illegible] to care for the mother and many a rough miner to comfort in the sore anguish of bereaved manhood. Even that infant, just weighed in the balance, [illegible] to her withered finger and clasp the small hand that no more will work.

But at last there came a day when the Lucky Streak was found, and then the miners came thronging back to the green hillsides with their tents, and finally the old familiar whistle blew its shrill blast through the long-silent gorges, and prosperity dwelt with them once again. It was only then that fortune took his hand with a kindly clasp and led him upward.

He had now been manager of the mines for some time, for his quick perceptions and his sound judgment had won for him a place among those of rich experience. Yet the troubles and perplexities that annoyed him, the constant subjection of his strong will to the little indignities of his work, fretted his proud spirit, and made him strive the harder to bring the time when he could throw off those hated shackles.

One late afternoon when work was done he rode out to his mother's for a restful hour among his books and the associations of his childhood. He had need of such renewal, for on this evening when the steady drive of cares were over, life seemed a very dull and aimless thing to him. "What am I working for?" he thought. "Why this constant struggle for such poor rewards?"

Men have their dreams of love as well as women, though in rarer glimpses, with the vivid colors half shut out by the strong framing of the outer world. But now, when life's gloom seemed to hang coldly over him, a picture rose before his inner vision of a refuge from all the besetting troubles of his way, a home that would be a haven of love, a place where his over-burdened heart could right itself for all its struggles with the storms of life. Grant him but this recompense for its buffetings, and he was satisfied. The warm rays of his glowing

heart—from [illegible]
make [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
woman's [illegible]
and strength [illegible]
for her sake. [illegible]
blessing in [illegible]
him when it was [illegible]
strength. Little did she know [illegible]
hiding-place in [illegible]
and powers of resistance.

"Come in, my son, and sit in your old place," she said, as he kissed her at the door. "I was glad you have come, for I am very lonesome here to-night."

He wished that she had met him with a budget of private news, or with some pleasant association to divert his own tired heart. But as of old, he had to be the comforter and not the comforted, though his stout spirit longed more than ever before, with a dull bitterness, for the balmy soothings of a home.

The day had been one of April's choicest, warmest days, so that as he sat down in the crimson cloth [illegible] the western window where Mabel had sat, the [illegible] from the swaying vines blew freshly in [illegible] singing harp, and brought [illegible] ful melodies of [illegible]

"How [illegible]
he said [illegible]
for a [illegible]
[illegible]
some [illegible]
in your work

"O, it is discouraging at times," he replied. "I have felt more than ever disheartened to-day. Ambition is forsaking me, I guess, mother."

"Such words from you!" said Mrs. Dennett. "Is it becoming for a strong man with health and good prospects to talk of discouragements? Just think of those who labor on amid the crushing misfortunes of ill health and persecution. Why, you should be happy and ambitious every day of your life."

He could not tell her that strong men had need of other things besides health and an open path to make them perfect in their strength; so he said no more, but closed his weary heart with its fruitless longings.

As he went back to the hotel the twilight deepened on his pathway, and enclosed the dying landscape with a soft and restful beauty that was welcome to his tired heart, and opened all its founts of love and tenderness. No wonder, then, that when he arrived at the hotel and saw Nellie Minton sitting dreamily there on the deserted veranda in the dusk, with a book lying idly beside her, while she seemed indulging in gentle, girlish fancies, he was tempted to seat himself by her side, and enjoy with her the sweet night air and the inspiration of the slumbering hour. She was very pretty in that soft light, with her mourning dress adding a shade of sadness to her fair face. Her eyes were full of a liquid darkness that also lurked with fitful shadowings in her hair, and even her voice borrowed a musical cadence from the enchanting melodies of the twilight winds. His heart reproached him for his former indifference to her. "She is only a girl with a *heart* full of gentle charity and girlish wishes," he

thought, as his idea of her frivolity and thoughtlessness melted in this new image of more lovely innocence. That little suggestion of sly art when she had offered her friendship to him on their journey in the stage was all forgotten, and he saw only a womanly dependence on his manly protection. He now felt almost ashamed that he had not received it with a more cordial welcome. "Let us take a walk in the twilight, Nellie," he said, almost fearing she would go in and leave him with his lonely musings. She brought a soft white shawl for him to wrap about her, and together they strolled down by the mill, through the odorous pine groves, and across the green, bright slopes beyond.

"I have not seen much of you, Edward," she said to him as they climbed the flower-lined path. "You are kept very busy, I know. Don't you grow tired of the grinding worriments of business sometimes?"

Why did she say that to him then? She knew not what a chord she had touched, how his heart was even aching for one word of sympathy in its strivings; but she knew that his answer had a warmth and ring it had always lacked, which thrilled her heart with strange new hope, — a hope that he might care a little for her after all; for he said, "Only they who are out in the full heat of the daily battles with the world know just how tiresome and profitless they seem at times. Nellie, if it were not for hours like these, when nature binds up the wounds of the day, and gives the mind a strength and peace in its restful loveliness, life would not be worth the living."

He looked down at her as she leaned upon his arm with a confiding, clinging touch, and bending over her to adjust her shawl that had fallen aside, there seemed wafted to him something of her delicacy and weakness which he had never felt before. She appeared so helpless compared to himself, so fragile to fight the battles of life! In return for a strong arm's generous protection, would she not give some of that true affection which he could not but hope dwelt in the hearts of all women?

This slight yielding to the charm and poetry of the hour stilled the unrest, and brought a healing to the weariness of his breast.

"In this feverish age, how many overburdened with its cares would not find even paradise in wandering on forever through these purple shadows, and in this fresh, delightful air," he said, taking off his hat to let the cool perfumes of the breezes blow on his forehead and in his hair.

And Nellie answered, "How many would not love it, even if they had no overburdening cares and battles to make them long for its repose? How many would not choose it among the best of joys, if they could find the happiness it brings to me?"

When he left her at the door something dewy sparkled in her eye, which moved him strangely with its seeming tenderness. He clasped her hand in farewell more cordially than usual, and said kindly, with his handsome eyes looking steadily down into hers, "We have had a pleasant walk, have we not, Nellie? Let me thank you for the pleasure you have given me."

But he forgot it when his soft pillow invited him to

the grateful oblivion of sleep; while Nellie sat for hours by her window, heeding not the fresh scents from the woods, nor the starry sky above her with its pulsing splendors, but hearing only those parting words singing through the pines, and breathing in tuneful harmonies in the swift, free winds.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SUMMER SCHEMES.

I hear their tones in converse sweet,
Like singing winds in summer bowers;
They speak of scenes and friends loved well
In by-gone times and pleasant hours.
*Selected.*

It was afternoon at the Royal Regina. A dull lethargy rested over the place, and a monotonous silence, broken only by a shutting door or a footstep through the hall, making a jarring contrast to the distant roar of the mill and the whispering pines without. In a pretty little sitting-room upstairs sat Mabel and Nellie by the broad, clear windows that looked out over the bright-roofed camp and the busy mines. Nellie was embroidering, with a great many rose-colored and pale green and pearl silk flosses, a strip of russet brown satin, and Mabel divided her time with a book and the glowing scene through the crystal window.

"Do you think Mrs. Dennett will be pleased?" asked Nellie, holding up her work for inspection.

"She ought to be. It is very pretty," answered Mabel.

"It is folly perhaps for me to do this," Nellie went on. "She paints and embroiders exquisitely herself, and I presume she has plenty of time, but I wanted to make her some little present, anyway, with my own hands, and this seemed about the only thing I could *do* up here."

"I am sure she will prize it higher than her own work because it is a gift," said Mabel, thinking how Mrs. Dennett's blue eyes would light up with pleasure when she saw it.

Nellie went on with her careful stitching, and Mabel looked out of the window again.

"O, there is that Mr. Brooklyn, your friend, coming out of the mill without his hat, and a handkerchief over his head," Mabel exclaimed after a pause. "He looks as funny as a clown," she added with a laugh.

Nellie leaned forward to see too. "That's just like him," she said. "He would n't do that for a mint if he thought we were looking at him."

"He is vain, then, and does everything for appearance."

"O no. But I rather guess there is a certain pair of hazel eyes he is somewhat afraid of these days." Mabel blushed, and Nellie continued: "He would n't like to have those eyes, of all eyes in the world, see him in his laboratory garb, especially if they saw in him a resemblance to a clown. To tell the truth,—the absolute truth," she said, growing earnest and laying her work down in her lap while she looked steadily at her companion,—"the man is more than half in love with you, Mabel. There is no denying it. I can read him like a book. You can have the jolliest kind of a time this summer, if you only manage him right. Just flatter him, and he is your willing slave. But, after all, he is not so foolish as to make himself a disagreeable one unless you want him, and that is a great convenience,—to have him ready to behave himself when you get tired of seeing him around. George is very proud, you know.

He has excellent prospects, besides being a charming fellow himself."

"Why," said Mabel, whose burning cheeks and excited eyes told the story of her agitation, "I am scarcely acquainted with Mr. Brooklyn yet. What makes you say such a thing as that?"

"Because I know him better than you do, and because I have ears also."

"You have ears! What have you heard?"

"O, nothing much. Just a hint, but I understood it. The other evening when Edward and I were out for a walk we lingered till the twilight had grown quite late, — we are such old friends, you know, and we had so many pleasant memories to recall, and so many other things to talk of, that neither of us realized how the time was going, — and so, as I came through the hall it was rather dark, I lingered a moment, remembering I had forgotten to tell him something of a little importance to both of us, and wondering if I had better turn back, when I saw two figures in the parlor, — George and Mr. Sevenoakes, — and I could not help hearing what they said. Mr. Sevenoakes, it seems, had been speaking about the success of the mines, and mentioned the rush of new-comers, and his companion, George-like (I can't think of anything else to call it), said, 'Yes, and better than that, it is delightful to have some of those new-comers ladies.' 'Aha,' said Mr. Sevenoakes, 'you are susceptible to such allurements, are you?' and George answered, 'I'll have to own up, while there's such a pretty girl here as that Miss Willis, that I am'; and though Mr. Sevenoakes concurred in his opinion, yet I could see there was a

vast difference in their degrees of admiration. Besides all this, I can see by George's behavior that he is wonderfully interested."

"Why, Nellie! Why did you repeat that to me? It was only idle talk. He would never have said such a thing if he had been in earnest."

"How many times will I have to inform you that I know Mr. George Brooklyn better than you do? He meant it. And all you have to do is to be a proper goddess, and you have more of your love [illegible] light[illegible] more enjoyment."

"Nellie Morse! As if I would make an [illegible] way," said Mary, seriously.

"As if you would [illegible] when [illegible]"

is so morbidly moral that she won't breathe for fear it is a sin. Edward Dennett, naturally enough, is likely to devote some of his time to my pleasure, and I intend to accept it, too, — though of course with us it is different from the affair between you and George. *We* are old friends, and little kindnesses have a far greater weight in such a case than when they are given through a temporary friendship only. However, do as you like, of course. Only I thought it so fortunate that George had taken such a fancy, for then we both would have so many opportunities to go out well provided with masculine protection. O, it would be charming, Mabel. Consider well before you make up your mind to snub Sir George."

"I have n't said I shall snub him, Nellie. I only objected to a deliberate planning for my summer's pleasure at the expense of another's feelings. If I ever accept any courtesy from him for the promotion of my enjoyment, it will not be with that end in view, but because I appreciate and accept an offered kindness which has no reference to the future for either of us, unless we choose to so agree."

"Of course, that is what I mean," chimed in Nellie. "You can get out of it easy as anything, by keeping him off a little. Only you 'll have to give him a little hope, — that is, you must be pleasant and appear to prefer him, — or you will not be able to keep him long, unless he is terribly in love."

"It is no use talking to you, Nellie," said Mabel. "You are a confirmed flirt, so my principles will never be appreciated by you. But if it is true that Mr. Brooklyn is my admirer, I shall never use that advantage *for any* benefit to myself."

"You 'll learn some time," said Nellie, appearing to be looking down at her rosy threads, but stealing a bright, quick glance upward at the blushing face by the window; "but only after you have lost thousands of good times."

The two girls sat in silence for some minutes, and finally Mabel asked idly, "Is n't Mr. Brooklyn rather young to be a first-class assayer."

"Yes. But then you know he is 'smart as a steel trap,' as some one long ago used to say of him. He has only been following this business two or three years. When I first knew him he was studying chemistry in an apothecary's shop. Which do you think is the best looking, George or Mr. Sevenoakes?"

"O, Mr. Brooklyn is the finest-looking, of course. But Mr. Dennett has very fine eyes," Mabel added innocently.

"Yes," Nellie said, almost starting at the mention of his name. "However few other claims Edward may have to good looks, his eyes are certainly very handsome."

"But I think Mr. Dennett is rather a nice-looking young man, without mentioning his eyes," said Mabel. "He is so powerful and well-formed, and his face is so full of expression, and so cheerful and bright." Somehow she took a mild delight in speaking of him. She was unconscious of it herself, but Nellie jealously guessed it, and kept on talking to see if she guessed aright. However, Mabel's thoughts were so innocent and natural that Nellie quite satisfied herself there was no danger from that source. She had opened the conversation with two objects in view. One was to create

an agreeable impression of George in Mabel's mind, and therefore to make the proposition of a summer's enjoyment suggest something better and more lasting, which Mabel could indulge in secret; and the other was to give her to understand by little hints, and apparently by little accidents, of her own standing with Edward Dennett, and thereby assure her it would be dishonest and unkind to usurp any of his friendship or attention.

She went on talking of him, and recalling old times and scenes. "When we used to live up here at the old town, which lies just over the hill from the camp," she said, "and I was a mere child and Edward only a half-grown boy, mamma and Mrs. Dennett used to be great friends. Of course that was long, long ago, for poor papa moved away a few years after the Golden Deep mines went down. We went to the city to live, and then we saw them but seldom, on their occasional visits there. But Edward and I have always kept up the 'contract' of friendship which we once made. Before poor dear papa's death, it was never possible for me to come up here, — it always brought such unpleasant recollections of his failure that he would never approve of it, — and so everything is quite new to me as well as to you, though Mrs. Dennett's home and the old mines look about the same as they did a dozen years ago."

Mabel found a quiet pleasure in listening to the praises of a blue-eyed boy who was manly and generous among rough and coarse companions, and sat listening to Nellie's stories until the sun hung threateningly near the horizon fringed with spear-like pines, and Nellie folded up her work and asked Mabel to go for a walk.

[illegible]

"[illegible]

back [illegible]

"Indeed, you are only too kind to risk [illegible] the dangerous stuff for a lot of flowers that I could get for the asking, and not have to be laid up for a week with a blistered face, either."

"Are you sure you would get poisoned?" asked Mabel. "Just think what a lovely view of all the surrounding mountains we would have from the summit of that rock above. Let me go, and you stay here."

"No," said Nellie. "You go for your mushrooms, and

I will wander off in another direction for flowers, and we will meet at dinner-time to compare trophies. How is that for a proposition?"

"Very well," answered Mabel up the height, rejoiced with the prospect of the fresh, bright flowers blooming so rarely beautiful from their high, unfrequented home, and the wide view of the grand wild hills spread out below her. "But you will not find anything better than I shall, I know," she added.

Nellie went down again, keeping close to the stream till she reached the hotel; and looking back, far up the long, steep hill, she saw Mabel's lithe form outlined like a statue of morning against the brown rock and the trailing vines around her, waving a snowy handkerchief and a spray of rich madroños in token of her triumph. Nellie smiled to herself. "How fortunate I was to get rid of her like that! I almost despaired of getting out alone when Edward is apt to be around. Now let her ruminate on her high Olympus, I can get enough from the much-scorned world below, if only *he* is nigh."

She looked at her watch. She still had time for a walk in the woods before the welcome whistle would blow, so she hurried away on the ferny path through the trees toward the Golden Deep. She was not afraid in the lonely, singing forest, for she felt it quite important to find a few flowers that would match Mabel's madroños. At last the whistle of the Lucky Streak shrieked out, full and hoarse at first, and rising to a high, shrill blast that went echoing through the forests and mountains with palpitating answers, and she started up to find something quickly and go home. But she

saw nothing till she came to the little clearing familiar to her from the time when she had so much secret satisfaction in walking across it behind George, and just on the edge of the thicket she caught sight of several clusters of delicate, pale blue blossoms nodding on their slender stalks in the gentle wind. She went fearlessly into the bushes and began gathering the fragile blooms, wandering on and on into the pines, for they were scarce, until she suddenly became aware that she was not alone in the grove. Two figures were before her, half hidden in the dim aisles of the pines, George and the lovely, dark-eyed girl she had seen with him before. Nellie shrank behind a tree-trunk, and doubted she could put off her haste homeward until she had studied something more of this romantic scene. It was too interesting to be missed. "They are a handsome pair," she thought, looking admiringly from the olive face of the girl, with her round, deep-tinted cheeks, her full red lips, and her thick, glossy black hair, to George, standing gracefully by an old pine-tree, his fine features all aglow with the interest of the moment, and his flashing eyes casting quick, admiring glances at the half-shrinking figure before him while he talked. Nellie could not hear his first words, but she heard Nita's answer with just a suggestion of the musical Spanish accent in it. "Yes, I'll promise to come," she said, "if you are sure no one will know it. But my father would storm fearfully if he should find out that I came to meet you here."

"No, my little maid of the mountains," said George, advancing a step and gazing his love unconsciously down her. "No one shall ever know it in this wide world."

Nellie could scarcely stifle a giggle at this juncture. "No one knows it now, and it will be a secret for you and me forever. And I will get you a ring for that pretty little hand, and you will be promised to me till I can claim you for my own. And then won't I have a beauty that every one will be envious of, for her fine dresses and her bewitching face. We will go away from here then, and so you must not breathe a word of this to a living soul, or something would happen to mar our hopes, my little love."

"Who should I tell it to? Not my father or mother, surely, or they'd soon stop it; and I would n't tell it to any one else."

"You must not think it strange if I do not meet you always just as we plan," he went on. "I must be very careful not to awaken any suspicion that you are my little sweetheart now."

"Yes, you'll be staying to admire some of those fine ladies up at the hotel. I saw one once; she was beautiful and good, and I know you would never like me if you could have her," said Nita, trying to tear herself from his strong clasp.

"Have her! Why, you are three times as handsome to me,—you suit me three times as well in everything. Ah! do you think I could exchange you for any of the girls up there at the hotel, my dear? This little beauty suits me best."

"Really, truly now? Honestly?"

"Yes," he returned, hastily. "But I must go. I heard the whistle from the mine just now, and I must be around the mill as if I had just left work; so good by. Won't you give me one kiss?"

"O, I could n't," answered Nita, looking frightened.

"O, yes, — come," he said, coaxingly. "I can't go away without it"; and he pressed a warm kiss on her bright red lips, and with a fond glance left her standing in the twilight woods. She waited till his footsteps ceased to crackle on the dried, fallen branches that hid themselves under the spring's covering of fresh green grasses, and started back to her home.

"I must have a better look at her," thought Nellie, coming boldly out of her hiding-place to meet Nita face to face. The girl did not see where the intruder came from, but she remembered of hearing no footsteps under the pines since George's died away, and her heart beat wildly, with a vague fear that they had not been alone. As Nellie passed, her face flushed a deep crimson, covering even her dusky brow and neck with a glow like the sunset. Nellie smiled. "Well she may blush," she said, "to be out secretly making love with such a man as he"; and she hurried off, thinking of Edward, while Nita stood sorrowfully watching the retreating figure till it was lost among the trees.

Edward Dennett, standing on the flowery slope above the mill, looking down on the other side at the shattered roofs of the old town, picturesque in their loneliness and decay, and enjoying a breath of the singing breeze, was surprised to see Nellie come out of the twilight shadows that were creeping into the surrounding woods. She started nervously when she saw him, as if all her mind had been centred on her own happy fancies, but looked up with a smile as he came toward her with a pleasant "Good evening." "Been out for flowers, I see," he said. "You are well repaid, for these are rare. Where did you get them?"

inspection over the mines. It was twilight, and the darkness was gathering in the pine forest that extended up to the mill on one side, but presently out of the shades came Nita with her usual basket of eggs for the hotel. The two men looked up when they heard the rustle of her footstep in the grass, and Mr. Sevenoakes remarked carelessly, "What a fine-looking daughter Logan can boast of."

"Yes," answered George, with a sly twinkle in his eye; "she *is* a good-looking girl."

"Plenty of fire, though," said Mr. Sevenoakes, crushing out the light of his discarded cigar with his foot, and leaving it a little doubtful which fire he meant.

"Not quite so much as you might think," said George, knowingly. "She is pretty easily managed sometimes. I would n't be afraid myself to undertake the task of subduing her fiery temper."

"O, you would n't, eh?" said the little man, laughing. "That 's because you don't know how she settles all the dandies who travel around in these parts."

"What will you bet I can't get her to take the best kind of notice of me now?"

"I would n't advise you to try," returned Mr. Sevenoakes, ready to dismiss the subject.

"Well, just watch," said George, starting away toward Nita, anxious to prove his power.

Mr. Sevenoakes perched himself upon a stump, laughing good-naturedly, and watched the proceedings. "Now I 'm ready to see one or both of them play the fool," he thought. "However, George is a pretty good sort of fellow, as the world goes, if he *is*

a little bit too sweet on the ladies,"—this not without rather a disagreeable remembrance of how the haughty, mincing, proud Mrs. Sevenoakes, who usually set her dainty blond head far above any one of George's station, had condescended to chat quite warmly with him one whole evening on the hotel veranda, notwithstanding that young man's efforts to be attentive to Mabel at the same time; and how afterward the fastidious Mrs. Sevenoakes had pronounced "that young Mr. Brooklyn" a very brilliant and entertaining person.

Nita was pursuing her way, unconscious of any one near, when George followed her a few steps, and touching her on the shoulder, said something to her. A deeper crimson burned on her cheek as she took his offered hand, but she shrank back as if to end the meeting there, when George led her over into the shadow of the mill, and within hearing of Mr. Sevenoakes, who sat placidly on his stump looking on, not without feelings of contempt for the whole affair, and rather wishing himself out of it, as something far below his dignity.

"Nita," said George, "won't you give me a lock of your hair to put in my watch-chain? I am going to send it away to-morrow to be woven, and I should like to have it now."

"Yes, I'll give a lock to you," she replied, her eyes sparkling. "How much will you have?" she asked, holding up a long black braid.

"This will do," cutting off a glossy strand with his knife. "Now good by; I hated to stop you here, but I could n't help it, you see; and your father will never know of it."

She turned to go, but caught sight of the superintendent seated comfortably on his elevated lookout, and observing the whole affair with a good deal of surprise. The sunset blush burned over brow and neck again as she hastened away, and great tears splashed on the shapely bare hand that held the basket.

"I've made something by it," said George, coming back to Mr. Sevenoakes with a triumphant smile, and holding up the lock of hair. "This will weave very prettily into my watch-chain. She is not such a spitfire, after all, when she's managed right; now, is she? She's a pretty little girl, and a pleasant one too, if you only just know how to take her."

George began to feel rather ashamed of his vanity, manifested in such a coarse way, and he thought best not to refer to it again, when Mr. Sevenoakes jumped down from his stump with a laugh, — about just what George was rather anxious to find out, — and offering a cigar, said calmly: "That proves nothing, young man. Every one is not so fascinating as you are. I would n't advise you to sail in too steep there, though; she might use her temper for even your benefit some day. Come on, let us go and see what Dennett's got over there in that dump-car which so interests him."

Meantime Nita went her way with her despised eggs on her arm, trying to see through fast-falling tears the swimming path before her. She was tortured by a tumult of agonizing fears. The fresh, bright world, and the star-gemmed twilight with its wooing beauty, were suddenly bathed in a mournful blackness. Was George a traitor to her? Was he deceiving her, after all? What shameful thing was this she had just done

in the sight of the world? She wiped her eyes to make herself more presentable in the great, lighted hotel kitchen, though her heart seemed torn and wounded with a wild unrest that brought the tears afresh.

But what voice was this, so sweet and soft and kindly, coming to her from the low side balcony, like a voice from heaven, and calling gently, "Nita!" She looked up. Mabel stood leaning over the white carved railing above, radiant in a snowy, lace-trimmed muslin, lighted up with a spray of rich pink oleanders and wild mountain fern. What a beautiful face she had for Nita, sickened with the world's treachery and unthinking cruelty! It was full of kindness and gentle pity; a face with patience in it, and beaming with the soft, glowing light of love. To Nita's quick remembrance there flashed the image of her own face as she had seen it reflected from her mirror, its dark, oval beauty graven with lines of deep impulse and feeling, brilliant with rich, warm hues coming and going, and great dark eyes gleaming with an unsteady glow. Mabel's face seemed far more beautiful to her, for behind those delicate features shone a spiritual glory and loveliness; there was a soft light in her clear, dark eyes, and the rich masses of her nut-brown hair seemed fine and glossy as spun silk. She was a lovely being, made of finer clay than poor, impulsive Nita.

Mabel's calm manner seemed to dispel Nita's unhappiness, and she looked up timidly, a great lull sweeping through the storm of her feelings, to this girl who seemed an angel in her purity.

"Come up to see me when you have disposed of your eggs," Mabel said; and somehow this mention of them

made the hated basket of pearly eggs seem far more honorable than before.

If poor Nita had a sorrow that night, she also had a joy that was to her a partial fulfilment of her fondest hopes; for Mabel, out of her well-filled wardrobe, gave her a silken, sheeny grenadine, glittering here and there with jetty spangles. Nita did not presume to kiss the fair delicate being who was so kind to her, but when she took her leave she held out her little brown hand and told her thanks so earnestly that Mabel saw it was hard work for the proud girl to keep back her choking tears. Nita went home with her precious gift in the empty egg-basket, and her heart, that had been heavy with sorrows, overflowing with gratitude and happiness, and even complete forgiveness toward George.

And George, whose conscience was very elastic, did not think that Nita had ground for any possible complaint against him when next he waited at their trysting-place in the wood, and silenced her jealous fears with assurances which he himself almost believed to be true.

His suit with Mabel did not progress any too well. She was cold-hearted, he thought, proud of her beauty and her wealth; but her shyness only made him desire the more to win her and glory in his conquest. But after the middle of summer he recognized a rival in the affair. The rival presented himself in the form of a tall, thin man, who was a lawyer, and consumptive. James Knowles had known Mabel when she was a child, and through a service done to her family held a strong claim on her kindness and consideration. However, George did not think it quite right that he should

exercise it to further his designs as a suitor, and follow her to this mountain retreat. Knowles was a silent man. He watched constantly every one around him, but seldom spoke except when roused up to the subject of the law, and then he always blazed forth with untiring eloquence, which not even the prospect of Mabel's company could persuade him to leave unfinished. He seemed secretly jealous of any one who even spoke to Mabel; and since he had nothing to do, he spent most of his time entertaining Mr. Sevenoakes and other worthies about the mine, and the rest of it listening and watching. George came to regard him as rather a dangerous rival, one who would be well armed if any fate should give an opponent the ascendency. He thought of Nellie Minton and her power to disgrace him, and the thought was not altogether wholesome; for he did not know what Knowles might not get hold of to worst him in case Mabel should at last be won. Still he could do nothing but "confound Nellie Minton," and call Knowles an "unprincipled cur," and let the matter rest. But George had a far more dangerous rival than Mr. Knowles, in Edward Dennett. It mattered little who cared for Mabel so long as her heart was untouched. But while Edward Dennett held such a charm for the pretty, true-hearted girl, it was useless for Aunt Willis to scold, and say that the young men of the mines were far below her station, or for even George Brooklyn or Mr. Knowles to lay siege to her heart.

Edward himself looked upon her as one of those rare beings who are like gems among gaudy baubles. He admired her; he respected her. He felt more: he almost loved her in a sense; and yet her pride and

apparent coldness chilled even his admiration, and he felt that she could never be more to him than a memory. And there was even something else that came between their friendship. Nellie's love-lighted glances made him feel that, although his heart was untouched by them, in consideration of his friendship to her, he should strive to save her feelings where he could do so without positive injury to himself.

July came, with its sultry heats and glimmering skies, and though the vein continued fair, and working was easy, Mr. Sevenoakes decided to celebrate the independence of his country by giving the men a holiday.

The day broke with a sky so rich and golden that even old residents took out their palm-leaf hats, and filled their sprinklers, with dubious thoughts about the heat, and the miners spent most of their time wishing for watermelons, or that they might pass the day at the bottom of the shaft. No whistle blew from the roaring mill that morning, and the bright weathercock on the top had to relinquish the highest place to the brilliant stars and stripes which Edward Dennett proudly hoisted before daybreak, so that even the earliest risers could see the glorious colors flaunting through the pines at their first look upon the outside world. From many a new-roofed dwelling in the town of Lucky Streak floated the dear old flag, and many a barefooted urchin shouted for George Washington, and fired crackers with true patriotic zest. The miners loitered about the town until the heat of the day came on, and then scattered about in the long cool sheds, busy over their cards and wine.

Edward Dennett had planned a little exploring party

to the old mines of the Golden Deep, partly to afford pleasure to the ladies at the hotel, and partly because he had a strong desire to visit the long-closed mill again. The neglected mill and the abandoned mine had fallen into the hands of his father after the cessation of mining operations, to satisfy an old debt. The property was considered nearly worthless, except for the half-worn-out machinery; and Edward, who inherited it after his father's death, found his time so occupied with his daily labors at Lucky Streak that he had never found a suitable opportunity to investigate its value. Around it lingered still its old-time glory in Edward's mind, and he could not help feeling somewhat proud of his ownership, notwithstanding the exhausted lode had long since lost its power to attract the restless gold-seekers. And so this holiday he felt that he could almost revive the feelings of his boyhood with a glimpse of the interior of the old abandoned mill. Consequently, on that warm July morning, the breakfast-bell at the Royal Regina rang a half-hour earlier than usual, and there was a genteel stir all over the house, that broke up pleasantly its long monotonous quiet. Most of the guests decided to go, so that there were nearly twenty persons in the little party, and all the available vehicles were in demand.

The old mines were less than a mile from Lucky Streak, and many preferred to walk, but Edward Dennett found himself faced with the puzzle of how to find a conveyance large enough to accommodate his friends. However, the matter was settled by Nellie, not altogether to his satisfaction, when Mr. Sevenoakes drove up to the crowded veranda in his shining black carriage with its

satiny black horses for Mrs. Sevenoakes and her lady friend, Mrs. Winsor.

"You selfish mortal!" said Nellie, as he came up the steps, "to have all that room in your carriage and not invite some of these poor waiting creatures to occupy it."

"That 's just what I intend to do," replied Mr. Sevenoakes, cordially; "come along yourself."

"Not I, indeed!" said Nellie, with a quick glance at Edward, who stood near the steps putting on his driving-gloves while he waited. The little man understood, and his precious pride was not wounded. Nellie was willing to forego the honor of riding with the superintendent's party behind his spirited blacks for the sake of Edward's company, and he had a careless respect for the motive.

"O, well," he returned good-naturedly, laughing, "it is Miss Willis I want. Will you consent to ride with us, Miss Willis?" Mabel looked toward Nellie, and the latter young lady telegraphed back in unmistakable language, "By all means, go. You will get rid of that distressing Knowles now"; and so Mabel went, although there was a certain sinking of her heart that she would not acknowledge even to herself. But Mr. Sevenoakes was agreeably affected, and assisted her to a seat with a good deal of airy grace, while proud Mrs. Sevenoakes, whose liking for Mabel was not too great, decided that she too should have a share in selecting the occupants of their carriage, and so with a stately toss of her blond head, and a melting look from her fine blue eyes, which did not make the most happy impression on her observing lord, said to George, "And

Mr. Brooklyn will be a valuable addition if he will come." That young man stood looking up toward the carriage (in reality at Mabel, but Mrs. Sevenoakes thought it was meant for herself), with an expression of careless admiration that was very becoming to his handsome face, which instantly changed to one of sparkling interest at these words; but he said, "You will be crowded, I fear; you have four already, so I must decline with thanks."

Mr. Sevenoakes's early impression of George had never changed. That first morning when the eulogistic paragraph in the Report had set him into such excellent humor, and George had appeared on the scene as the originator of it, and had promised to be such a pleasant, companionable fellow, always rose before him at such times as these, and gave the little shuttle-like man greater breadth of action. If there was anything that could win him, it was a word of praise, not vulgarly bestowed, but given as if an acknowledgment of true merit, and he never ceased to gratefully remember the compliment. If it had not been for this, it is quite likely Mr. Sevenoakes would not have said so heartily, "Plenty of room, of course, George. *You* are expected, anyway. On the back seat with Miss Willis I presume you can manage to find a place"; and of course George did manage, for Mrs. Winsor immediately offered to sit on the front seat, where there was more room, since Mrs. Sevenoakes was so small and willowy.

George was in the seventh heaven of bliss. He adjusted the robe with careful politeness, praised in glowing terms the changing scenes before them, even quoted

in a deep, melodious voice stray bits of poetry, and charmingly alluded to the joy it would be to him could he always be skimming through such balmy air with a white-robed fairy beside him. It was rather a bold thing to say to a girl like Mabel, who had never given him even a ghost of encouragement; but George was always free with his compliments, and his manner gave them a spice of audacity that was at first very agreeable. He ingeniously made occasions, and paid them gracefully; and they always seemed to have a hidden fire and a personal application, that made them seem more than mere words, so that even when they were unwelcome they could not be repelled very effectively; and this morning they were accompanied with glances of undisguised admiration from his handsome dark eyes that in some cases would have been irresistible. But they were lost on Mabel, who was thinking idly how in the world Mr. Sevenoakes, who sat in front of her, could always keep his fine black coat without the slightest suggestion of dust, his black beaver so glossy, and his bright sleek hair so evenly combed in an exact curving line along his fair, pink-tinted neck.

Knowles, standing on the steps, had seen one of George's love-freighted looks, and turned away, white with rage, muttering, "I expect now I've got as much to fear from that evil-eyed scamp as from the honorable Dennett himself. I shall have to kill one or both of them." He had guessed Mabel's secret already, and knew that although George had been openly his opponent, and Edward had devoted some of his time to Nellie, Mabel's cheeks had borrowed the deeper tint of the rose's heart, and her eye had beamed with a soft, *new* light, whenever Edward spoke to her.

Edward Dennett saw George's glances, too, but he only smiled to himself. He felt that to this lovely girl, whose path had seemed to lead in pleasant places, such proofs of devotion were quite unheeded; and he was right.

It was with interest that the party opened the wide, creaking doors and entered the musty ruins of the old mill. Its rafters, once bright red, had turned to brown cracked beams, and on its broad sagging belts the dust of years had collected, thick and mildewed. There were traces of past elegance in the embellished pillars and the fine-grooved floors, and the unmistakable marks of neglect and decay in the rusty machinery and the rain-stained walls. The buildings were large, and all adjoined, so that the party went from one to another well protected from the hot July sun without. There were the little offices, with glass doors and moulded ceilings; the great machinery-room full of motionless wheels, and rusty, broken water-pipes; the engine-room, from which that hissing steam-generator had been removed, leaving a black, oil-stained hole; and the terrible shaft-house, with its cages hanging over the door of the gaping black pit, and its cars piled up in disordered heaps over the pumps and windlasses.

To Edward Dennett these scenes were particularly interesting. It recalled his happy, careless boyhood to see those broad doors opened wide, letting in the sun that for so many years had been shut away from the damp floors, and to hear the voices echoing resonant and clear from the hollow domes as of old.

"Ugh! this atmosphere reminds one of a cold blast from the ruins of the Mediæval ages, it is so

mouldy and damp and close, with no suggestion of nineteenth-century civilization or sunshine," said Mabel to Edward, as they entered the shaft-house.

"Your remark seems but an echo of my thoughts," he replied; "but the Middle Ages represent my early life, and these noisome scents come from the decay of the perishing years."

He stood silently looking around him, recalling old associations, remembering how, when he was a small lad, he had deemed it a herculean feat to push one of those empty ore-cars along its shining track, how he had held his hand to catch the muddy stream that poured out of the wide-mouthed pumps, and looked with wonder upon those flying belts and buzzing wheels. But the coming years and the crown of manhood had made all these things clear, and he was master of his work in every line; and now he was still standing among the grander mysteries of life, like a child trying to discern with his weak insight the mighty problems of existence. We only rise higher to learn how much deeper was our previous ignorance. He had stood but a moment thus, lost in reverie and reflection, when he suddenly roused himself from the graves of the past, lest his thoughtful mood should seem like indifference to Mabel. But when he looked around for her, she was gone.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TUNNEL AT THE GOLDEN DEEP.

**Oh, there is nothing holier in this life of ours than the first consciousness of love, — the first fluttering of its silken wings, the first rising sound and breath of that wind which is so soon to sweep through the soul, to purify or to destroy. — LONGFELLOW.**

THAT was an eventful day at the old mill for two lives at least. The current of our destiny is sometimes turned into other channels by only a shining bar of pebbles or a low reef of crumbling rocks; and so by the slightest chain of happenings on this day revelations were made that changed the course of all after-coming events.

There was a great deal of merry-making inside those dingy walls, and at last a few decided to take lunch there, and sent a messenger over to the hotel for the viands. They spread the table on an overturned car, and dined in unique picnic fashion, enjoying their queer surroundings even more than if they were in the midst of outdoor leafy woods, gathered about the low, flat rocks that nature seems to have designed for the table of primitive man.

Nellie was in high glee, having secured Edward for the day, as she thought, and her glib tongue and blithe manner made her appear to be the most brilliant lady in the company. George sarcastically whispered to Mabel at the table that she certainly was the most brilliant, when a ray of glowing sunlight broke through

the shattered roof and fell upon her bright auburn hair, lighting it up beautifully with a thousand flecks of reddish gold.

After lunch a few gathered in one of the little offices to hear a story about the place from Mrs. Dennett, while others sauntered around, intent on exploring to the fullest extent the quaint ruins of the mines. Among the latter was Mabel, who succeeded in ridding herself of George, and getting her hat, stole quietly out of the wide front doors for a glimpse of the reddish mounds of earth and the strange wrecks lying about the buildings outside.

She had not been gone long when Mrs. Willis sought Edward Dennett, as one the most familiar with the vicinity, and asked him if he would find her, adding, "I am afraid of this spot, there are so many shafts and terrible places."

Nellie was not pleased to be deprived of her best company, so she said, partly as a warning, but more as a petty revenge to nettle the fretful lady, "You had better be careful that she does not wander off and marry that same young man you have sent for her. Mabel's money might be a temptation even to the most honorable person."

The eccentric old lady had her doubts about the last statement, but she believed that any one of Mabel's admirers was especially partial to her small fortune, and hence she was suspicious of all alike. So this last shot cost Mabel an hour of rigid, painful questioning.

Edward sauntered off through the buildings, and at length, thinking it quite likely she had taken a notion to explore outside of the building, he found his hat and

went out. No Mabel was there. At last Nellie's voice called from a small broken window, "I think Mrs. Willis has found her now. I hear a commotion, such as there would likely be; so you had better come in. I would like so much to have you show me that fungi on the trap-door of the shaft." But just then Nellie was called away by an impatient voice, so Edward was left alone to loiter about in the shadow of the old mill, busy with his thronging memories. This had been a thoughtful day for him,—a long review of the vanished past. He had talked with Nellie and had shown her about, but he had scarcely heard her; his mind was crowded with other thoughts,—the scenes of his youth, in which even Nellie herself, then lithe little Nellie, deceitful and wilful, with her long auburn braid and her trim little figure, appeared.

Over on a hillside west of the mill was an old tunnel, and though he had seen it often since the closing of the mine, he still felt a curiosity to look again into its dark, dripping cavern. It was but a short distance through the hot sun to the refuge of the pines on a cool bank, and he walked quickly till he reached the shade, and then strolled along dreamily through the delicious, cool, damp scents till he arrived at the tunnel.

The bright sunlight dazzled his eyes, so he hesitated a few moments at the mouth of the tunnel to accustom them to the darkness before venturing in. First there appeared to his sight the arched, swollen timbers covered with magnificent fungi, propping up like huge ribs the crumbling walls till they were swallowed in the blackness far into the hill. The water, which in winter and spring constantly dripped from

overhead and formed a stream in the bottom of the tunnel, had now ceased, leaving only a mouldy moisture seeping through the walls, and making the filmy webs, which the spiders had woven in damp and darkness on the jutting rocks, sag down into tiny fairy hammocks with the weight of shimmering dew. Farther and farther he could see into the darkness, as he stepped slowly from stone to stone on the wet ground, where iris-hued ripples danced and darkled in the agitated pools, and cast great rings of pale gold reflection over the roof and walls, radiating swiftly out into unknown blackness before him. He paused to pick off a piece of loose rock from the side of the tunnel and examine it in the dim twilight; it was a bit of quartz with a crystal point, and covered with a mixture of black mould and reddish soil. He tossed it away, and heard its short, clear splash as it sank into the water; but he was sorry afterward, for his examination had been too hasty. "I'll go farther in and find another piece," he thought, as he prepared his match-safe for immediate use. But when he looked up again, there in the centre of that narrowing tunnel, framed by the ivory arches and the soft, gold flying rings, he saw a dainty figure, clad in white, outlined with supernatural brightness against the deep, dark background.

Something like a tremor ran through him as he saw it, appearing as if by magic to his startled vision, but in a moment he recovered himself and made sure that it was no spirit enshrouded with mystery haunting this underground retreat, but a creature of flesh and blood, — even Mabel Willis. "I find you in rather a strange place, Miss Willis," he called, with an effort to hide

his surprise; but his voice sounded strained and hollow, and echoed faint and far into the unsounded depths beyond.

Mabel's heart was beating rapidly. What would Nellie say if she could see them there? In such a dark and ghostly place we are strangely attracted toward our fellow-beings; and so Mabel, frightened with the unusual surroundings, instinctively looked to Edward with a sense of dependence that found in him support. She forgot the cold reserve she had assumed toward this man from a feeling of honor to Nellie.

"So you do," she replied, trying to appear natural, but succeeding no better than Edward. "I find you in a strange place, too, Mr. Dennett. I hardly know how to explain why I came here, except that, wandering along the hillside, I saw this dark tunnel, and ventured in farther and farther to see the iridescent ripples on the water, until you find me here. It is magnificent, but terrible, too," she continued, drawing a little closer to him as if even afraid of the golden reflections on the walls. He was about to say something, when Mabel started suddenly, and gave a faint scream that went shrieking away into the hollow voids, in weird, palpitating whispers, and she stood rooted to the ground, her eyes fixed on a coiled snake, striped with pale yellow and dull black lines, which were fast changing to brilliant hues of orange and red, and bright, satiny black, in its anger. He stepped forward to lead her quickly out, but her fright had driven her almost to desperation, and she caught his shoulder and fell half fainting into his arms. There was just a moment when he unconsciously gave himself up to the

great wave of rapture that swept over him when he felt her clinging arms, and her quick breath on his cheek, and then he was hurrying from stone to stone, almost carrying her in his strong clasp. When they were out near the mouth of the tunnel, where the full, strong light of day shone in upon them, it revealed Mabel, pale and trembling, her white dress speckled with spatters of mud, and little ragged, dew-gemmed pieces of spider-webs in her glossy hair; and Edward, whose face was flushed, and whose eyes beamed with a soft and far more tender light than ever before. It was useless now to resist. That clinging trust, that dependent innocence, had won his heart. The serpent, whose primal curse has made it the most loathsome and despised of creatures, had in this one instance been instrumental for good, though not through its own merit. Mabel was no longer a proud and stately woman, but a girl with all the delightful qualities she had seemed at first to possess, and added to them, that charm the absence of which would render all the others nearly worthless, — a loving, trustful nature. As he led her out of the tunnel into a little grove of pines and firs, and seated her on a fallen log, the magic of that gentle touch was still upon him. It had brought with it a spell; had opened the fountain of her heart, and revealed therein a multitude of trembling hopes and fears. He remembered how Nellie had rested her hand confidingly on his arm only the night before in the moonlit veranda. The memory of it brought a feeling almost of disgust. How insipid seemed her animated, artful presence now! He cast off all doubts concerning his duty to Nellie, knowing full well his

thoughts and motives with regard to her could weigh but little against this new feeling which had come over him, and from that moment he never regarded Nellie as capable of possessing woman's choicest gift, — a true and noble love.

He was not a man to be a laggard in such affairs when once his heart was deeply touched. The fire and enthusiasm of his youth awoke him suddenly to the realization of this new impulse, and his impatient spirit longed to be up and doing.

As he sat half reclining on a gray rock looking at his fair companion, that weird excitement he had felt in the tunnel still controlled him, and he said, forgetful of time and place, thinking only of this new-found delight, "Miss Willis, if you and your friends will come down into the mill to-morrow after the noon whistle blows, I will show you the thing for which all these mighty pits were made. It was cleaning-up day yesterday, and our wonderful quartz vein has yielded equal to its best record. Do not disappoint me," he said, more softly than at first. "It would cheer the whole of my day to have you come."

Mabel's dark eyes glanced up in astonishment. There was something in his tone that made the words significant, a smouldering fire in his eyes, which always had been so frank and tender, that lighted up, like the breaking of the morning, his whole face.

"O, I should so much like to see the gold; I will certainly come," she said simply.

As they arose to go, and she daintily gathered up her dress to pass over a ledge of quartz that cropped out of the bank, Edward took her hand to help her over, and

kept it in spite of her gentle efforts to draw it away as they walked to the mill, leading her carefully among the rocks and red mounds of earth to the great wide door.

Just as they were entering, an apparition in the shape of a human head, with glorious eyes, a handsome face, and dark curling hair, rose up out of one of the shallow prospect-holes, and George's smooth voice called, "Ah! How long has this been going on? I have been wondering what was the reason of the ominous absence of all wit and beauty from the company. Miss Willis, I wanted you to see Mr. Sevenoakes test the old pumps, and he has been for a long time about the work. Ned, you 'd better surrender her here instead of taking her back to the mill, as we shall miss seeing it if we lose any more time."

Edward stopped a moment to say, "I never surrender, — especially when I 'm not given a sufficient reason why I should"; and then resumed his way.

George sprang up out of the prospect-hole, and advancing a few steps, said, with a good deal of assurance, as if his dignity had been affronted, "Excuse me, but I think Miss Willis will go with me."

Edward stopped again, and looked around as if awaiting her decision. It was a trying moment for Mabel. Here suddenly she was forced to choose between the man who had paid her open attention and the man who had shown her only politeness and gentlemanly consideration. They both seemed worthy of her friendship; and she dreaded to offend either. Then she remembered that George had spoken before of taking her to see the pumps, though she had stolen

away to the tunnel to escape from going with him. She did not dare to look up, but she knew that Edward's earnest blue eyes were resting upon her. Her heart had decided the question long before, why should she hesitate now? She turned to George, "Come into the mill in a few minutes, and then I will go."

As they walked away, George muttered between his teeth, while his eyes — those same eyes that could beam so tenderly with looks of love — flashed fires of anger, "He shall pay for that before many days; and if he steals Mabel from me, or even attempts to, he shall suffer all I choose to make him."

Mabel waited in the mill, but George did not come to claim her, until at last Edward said, ignoring the circumstance completely, "Come, let us find Nellie, and go to see how the old pumps used to work."

But George thought it best not to remain away from the scene of action too long and give his rival the start, so he strolled up to the little group as they watched the working of the husky, dry pumps, and resumed his friendliness with Mabel, even trying to draw her away from Edward and Nellie; but she proved to be a young lady with a will of her own, and would not go.

On their homeward ride George improved well his opportunity to be agreeable, and spoke lightly of the occurrence which had displeased her. "Miss Willis," he said, "I could not very well come into the mill for you to-day without offending your friend Mr. Dennett"; to which Mabel replied, as if wholly unmindful of the slight, "Pray, do not think of it. And I, of course, could not at first go with you to see the pumps, for the same reason."

That evening the miners were to celebrate the Fourth with powder and rockets, in the absence of better pyrotechnics. They chose an open space out in front of the hotel for their operations, and as twilight drew on, and the winds began to stir and moan in the pine woods, and the stars to pierce with their diamond-pointed rays the dusky skies, the guests of the hotel gathered on the balcony to enjoy the entertainment.

Up the white road from the mill came two figures,—Edward and George. A swift blush spread over Mabel's cheek as she saw them and remembered the events of the day. She could not feel exactly easy in her mind about it; but what delight it had been to her to choose as she had! Ah! that was what troubled her,—the thought that she had no right to feel this happiness if she stood in Nellie's way.

The two came rapidly up the broad, sweeping road, George carelessly graceful, with his fine-scented cigar that gleamed brilliantly in the fading twilight, his eyes fixed upon the array of airy muslins on the balcony above; and Edward, erect and manly, moving with a quick, firm step, and looking far out across the clear-cut ranges to the pale gold of the after-glow in the horizon. But he too glanced up as they neared the balcony, and Mabel saw his fine eyes, touching up with an expression of tenderness the strength that was revealed in his face. How incomparably more noble he looked than his companion!—though Mrs. Sevenoakes remarked to Nellie almost simultaneously with the thought, after the two men had disappeared under the balcony, "That young Mr. Brooklyn, the assayer, is certainly a very fine-looking man. He has an indifferent air about him that is peculiarly fascinating."

"O yes," Nellie replied, leaning back lazily and adjusting her black grenadine so it would float out more beautifully over Mabel's fresh white dress; "George is rather nice-looking, but he is not exactly the type I admire most. I like plenty of strength in man."

"And plenty of strength in your lemonade, too, I 'll warrant," said George, coming through the long French windows behind her, breathless from his hasty ascent of the stairs. "Mr. Sevenoakes has some, ice-cold, in the hall, with the pure crystals of the summits in it. But he says no gentleman can procure it for a lady. The girls must come themselves. That 's his dodge, you see, to get a look at the pretty ones."

"Come," said Mrs. Sevenoakes, by way of invitation, and rising to go. "We will surely have to comply with those requirements if we get any. And let us hurry before the ice melts; it seems as if it might dissolve in a moment on a night like this."

"O well; who would n't be looked upon for a glass of lemonade in such a season?" said Nellie, following Mrs. Sevenoakes.

"I thought I said that our worthy superintendent only wanted to *look* at the *pretty* ones," remarked George, sarcastically, as Nellie's trim dark figure vanished through the door; and he took the vacant seat by Mabel. "Don't you intend to go, when you could fill the requirement so easily, Miss Willis?"

"No; I have already had some, thank you."

"Some what? Admiration? I 've no doubt of that. But you do not need to go away from here to be admired, I can assure you. I 'll see no fireworks to-night if you are in sight."

"I can assure you if you look at the fireworks you will spend your time far more profitably to yourself," answered Mabel, with annoyance in her tone which she could not conceal. He had committed an unpardonable offence by slighting her publicly in a fit of temper, and she had concluded that his friendship was not worth keeping.

Edward Dennett came through the French windows at that moment, and finding a vacant chair, placed it behind Mabel, and took his seat there, as if he intended to remain.

"Come around here, Ned," said George, shaking a chair beside him; "here's an empty place in the front row."

"I shall get along very well where I am, thank you. Those places belong to the ladies, I believe."

Nellie and Mrs. Sevenoakes came back at this juncture, and George, suddenly remembering that he had usurped another's seat, rose, and with a majestic bow offered to give it back. "No, I 'm going to sit over at the farther end with Mr. and Mrs. Sevenoakes, for the present at least," Nellie said. She appreciated George's influence in the position he already occupied too well to wish to disturb him. But it was useless. Mabel had wounded his vanity more keenly than any woman had ever done before; and though reluctant to give up the pleasure of the evening to the silence of injured innocence, still he resolved to try the effect of it for a while. So he remained quiet, and at length appeared very indifferently to enter into conversation with Mrs. Dennett. His experiment proved that he was perfectly welcome to follow such a course the whole evening, *which* in fact he was compelled to do.

Edward sat quietly thinking of Mabel. Unconscious as he had been of the feeling, he realized now that this new affection, springing up in his heart, had been rooted there long before, though he had allowed it no sunshine or cultivation. He remembered how he used to look for her pretty face in the dining-room, on the veranda, or in the pine grove at twilight: he remembered how her clear eyes had haunted him through the long days at the noisy mill, bringing him a vague delight: and he had thought what a pity she should be a worldly woman going about in the guise of an angel. At last he leaned over Mabel's chair and said, "Are you tired, Miss Willis, after our day at the mill?"

"Not tired now," said Mabel. "I had such a long rest after dinner that I feel as lively as ever. We are to dance for a few hours after the fireworks, I think, though Aunt Cynthia has warned me that I need not expect to stay up for it."

"Well, the fireworks ought to be our best enjoyment on a day like this, for they serve to keep glowing our enthusiasm for our country."

"Yes; and to me this celebration will be peculiarly interesting, because I see it against a background of wild mountains and unthinned forests, where I scarcely hoped to find such a spirit of patriotism."

"Oh! then you think that because we live away on the heights of isolation we are not creatures imbued with human feelings, but simply an outgrowth of our lonely habitation, with none of the impulses that govern the outside world."

"Not exactly that; but it is true, we seem to be on the frontier of a strange country. There is a restful

quiet here. Before I came, I never even dreamed there could be such a spot on earth, but I am very happy to have found it, and so it is not strange that I should think these people would be content to let the world go by, free from its struggles and ambitions, secure in their blue-domed fort built in the rocky hills."

"You are right. It seems a pity that there cannot be such a place to serve as a refuge for those who have grown weary of worldly clashings. But the truth is, mankind love to be slaves of this arbitrary power, and they carry it with them to the remotest corners of the globe. We have it here, Miss Willis; for it has penetrated nature's fastnesses wherever civilized man plants the symbols of his coming. We leave to barbarians the sweet freedom for which the heart so often longs. Would you forgive me if I told you at first I thought you a being of cold and stately dignity, who banked up the fires of feeling until they sank deep beneath the barriers of circumstance and reason? I believe I have learned better."

"O, surely you misjudged me. I feel that I am too much a child of feeling. And yet I hope that I seldom overstep the bounds of wisdom or the promptings of my conscience."

"Do not fear; you are not likely to do either. I love to see the most sacred impulses of our natures given the swaying power instead of the colder, more material desires that promise only temporal good."

"O yes; but even then there is another extreme which goes to the length of sacrificing everything to a mere idea. Nellie explains that to me so often that I ought not to forget it."

"Nellie looks on the worldly side. You should not listen to her when she talks so."

Mabel's eyes flashed, and she drew away. "You forget that you owe something to Nellie more than to others, and you should not say that."

"I remember that I owe her my friendship, which she has, and nothing more, and that is in no way incompatible with what I have said."

"So Nellie has been deceiving me," Mabel thought; but she made no explanation of her words, that she might so far shield her friend's honor.

After this they sat in silence and watched the crimson rockets cleave the skies, quenching the splendor of the stars, and throwing a lurid glare as they ascended over the black-stemmed pines and their glistening branches, until the heavy-loaded stage rolled up to warn them that the hour was growing late, and so dissolved the spell.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ESTRANGEMENT.

O you that have the charge of love,
  Keep him in rosy bondage bound,
As in the fields of bliss above
  He sits with flow'rets fettered round.
Loose not a tie that round him clings,
Nor ever let him use his wings, —
Like that celestial bird whose nest
  Is found beneath far Eastern skies,
Whose wings, though radiant when at rest,
  Lose all their glory when he flies.

MOORE.

IF Love would always be love, he would then be comparatively harmless; but when he puts on his war-paint and goes to war, he is stronger than a thousand braves. And he was on the war-path now at this little mining camp among the hills; so thus it came about that society there was in a ferment.

George was disappointed in not winning the golden prize which he had hoped to obtain; he was enraged at being slighted by Mabel; his vanity, that precious plant which grew so rank yet was so delicate, had been wounded almost past healing by Edward Dennett's success. His love of conquest was most absolutely and constantly discouraged by Mabel; his compliments failed signally, his love-glances were never seen, and his attentions were steadily unsuccessful. It nettled him to see Mabel's eyes shine brighter at the sound of

Edward's footstep; and so when Mr. Knowles, already in a state bordering on desperation, sought his friendship, and hinted that Edward held too good a place for a "man who was willing to usurp the rights of every one else, and should be put aside," George was of the same opinion.

"The mine is going down a little these last weeks, and does not need so many workmen. Dennett's place could be easily filled by some one else, *under you*," said Knowles, his hollow eyes burning with a hungry fire.

"O well. What can *I* do?" said George, impatiently.

"All you want to do. You know Sevenoakes has greater faith in you now than in Dennett."

"Ha, ha! Sevenoakes knows where his bread is buttered." Nevertheless, these seeds were not planted in sterile soil.

One evening, as the whistle blew for six, George appeared in the laboratory door while Edward was still below in the shaft, and said very sociably to the workmen, "Come around to my den, boys,—the outside door,—if you want to see something wonderful." Accordingly, a horde of rough, ignorant fellows filed around the corner of the mill and ranged themselves before the door, when George invited them in with a conciliatory air, and proceeded to show them some very rich specimens of quartz, and also his method of separating the quicksilver from the gold that had been taken from the mill. Edward, coming up out of the mine, looked into the deserted machinery-room to see if things were all right, and then passed out and locked the door. Going round to the laboratory, he saw George's guests gathered like

a pack of hungry tramps in the little room, but he took no notice of them,—passing through to secure the door that opened into the machinery-room, and putting the key into his pocket, he said a hasty good night, and was gone.

George looked up with a scornful smile, and seeing it reflected from the grimy faces around him, said, "Dennett has to come sneaking around to see what we're doing. I presume he likes to show his authority about as well as a Walla chief. Though it's not his affair what I do in here, boys. I'm not in his books. In fact, Sevenoakes and I manage this thing without dictation from any one."

This was met by murmurs of approval from all sides. Ignorant man is turned like a leaf in the wind, even against his benefactor, when managed by a superior who understands his weaknesses; and so, thus encouraged, one burly young fellow, ready always to lead, tossing his cigarette out of the window in his excitement, and spitting on the floor,—which last act caused the dainty George to wince slightly,—said, "That's right, I'm glad somebody is out of his reach. He's too blamed pertic'ler, anyway. He watches around just as if we were thieves a-tryin' to rob the amalgamator or sluices."

"What makes you stand it?" asked George.

"Have to. He don't do nothing to make a row about; but it's just them mean, picayunish little things that makes a feller mad."

"Well, stand up for your rights, then. Sevenoakes don't want anybody here abused, even about little things," said George, rising to go. The foul tobacco *was* rather too much for him.

The men went away, feeling very much abused by the restraints they were under during work hours. They were of a rough class that often drifts around through the mining regions, always following the last exciting discoveries, ready, at every fancied wrong, to stir up discord, and most of them without the ties of home and friends to restrain them from acts of violence. They were flattered by George's notice of them, and felt that in him they had a powerful advocate; and so the spirit of insubordination was roused from its slumbering. They were restless under the discipline they were obliged to observe, and the loop-hole that was now offered them to escape from it promised excitement at least to their vulgar natures.

George left the mill that evening with an increased elasticity in his step; but he had to dine alone, since his little visit with the "boys" had made him late for dinner. Afterward he sought the hotel balcony, where Mabel and Nellie often sat. But Edward was already there, and he and Mabel stood by the low white railing looking off into the liquid depths of sky where the sun had vanished.

The days that had followed his awakening to the dream of love at the old mill had been full of delights to Edward. He felt that after years of loneliness he had found what his heart longed for, — a haven of repose, where he could come with his overladen spirit for the comfort and the inspiration man so sorely needs to prepare him for the battles with the world, and which it is woman's highest mission to bestow; a friend that he could trust, whose every profession was made with honesty and truth, whose heart was as fresh and inno-

cent as the flowers of the field. He had spoken no word of love to her, but many had been their little talks that wove their hearts together, and Mabel often found herself fondly living over again the happy scenes in their friendship which she loved to think of best.

George found them in the midst of one of those pleasant talks, but he had no compunctions about interrupting it. "Where 's all the rest of the people?" he inquired.

Edward turned. "They seem to have chosen the parlors, or perhaps they are preparing for the party this evening. They are to dance, I believe," he said.

"O yes; Knowles told me so," George replied, turning carelessly to leave; but his wrath was stirred, and his vindictive nature longed for revenge for this thing that he was forced to see so often. Passing through the French windows that opened onto the balcony, he discovered Nellie sitting alone in the gloomy library, and watching through the window the two figures that leaned over the railing. She started and colored slightly, that faint pink which sometimes crept over her white cheeks, but George did not see it in the late twilight. "You were not very successful, — eh, Sir George?" she said, in a tantalizing tone.

"Nor you either, sitting here peeking through the curtains, — at *nothing*," he returned sullenly.

"Say, George," Nellie said, coaxingly, ignoring his last thrust, "there's no use for you and me to conceal things and act foolishly. Let us work together. Somebody has planned for dancing this evening. You are to take me, since Edward no doubt will only give me

his arm and the sight of his ear as he talks to Mabel. Then we will settle matters."

"I 'll ask Mabel first if she 'll go. That 's fair, you know; for I don't think Ned intends to stay up this evening. That lank Knowles came prowling around to inform me of this fact, which he uprooted somewhere, and that he was to take Mabel himself. Ha, ha! the assurance of the long-legged cur! That was a hint for me to let him alone, for we 're in some kind of a compact about a little piece of business these days; at least, he 's the author and designer; I 'm the executor and skilful finisher. It will benefit you too, when we succeed, — understand?"

Nellie was looking up at him through her long dark lashes, with a glance of deep inquiry. She did not believe much in his stories, knowing that he hated her because of her power over him. "Nonsense!" she said; "two men planning to overthrow a simple little thing like this, — by upsetting the foundations of the whole structure, I suppose!" She was ambitious for Edward's success, unless driven to the last extremity. "While you are maturing your plans, the mischief will be done. They are even now talking sentimental stuff out there about the 'ancient trees glorying that they still are green and young,' — ancient trees are not the only things that do that, however. Come to me to-night and we 'll settle it." And with a quick glance behind her, the slim, dark figure glided out of the shadowy room.

The little talk on the balcony was soon disturbed again. Aunt Willis was the intruder this time. She came out, tall and majestic, her gray eyes flinty with

determination. "Mabel," she said severely, "(excuse me, Mr. Dennett,) it is already late, and you are out here without a wrap. You must come in now." And so Mabel went.

"See here," said the irritated old lady as they reached their rooms. "You have done quite enough of that soft mooning with our new friend. He looks as fair and as noble-hearted as a Saxon, but he's as designing as a gypsy. Do you know what Nellie tells me? She says that you, — my niece, who ought to have a world of pride and be as choice as a queen, — that you are actually encouraging that young man, who no doubt wants your money, if he can get it. The idea! *You*, out talking sentiment with a man who works in the mines, and neglecting Nellie and Mr. Knowles, our old friends! See, Mr. Knowles has sent you a knot of curly fern to wear to-night, and he has my permission to take you into the ball-room. We should always esteem him, Mabel; he has been kind to us in the past, and at least deserves our sympathy now in his affliction."

"Aunt Cynthia, do you think I should encourage his attentions when I do not want them? I have never ill treated Mr. Knowles."

"You have shown your preference for a comparative stranger, to the exclusion of your friends."

"I *do* prefer Mr. Dennett to Mr. Knowles. I do not think Mr. Knowles is a man of good principles. Do you want me to even *act* a falsehood?"

"By no means. But do not seek opportunities to air your bad taste and lack of appreciation of old friends."

*Mabel* turned to the window. The evening had lost

its brightness, and the dim night seemed shutting around in fantastic shadows, that mocked at her and hope; but she went with Knowles, and wore the curly ferns, and none perceived her heavy heart under her assumed gayety and life.

That night the ball-room's many lights shone brilliantly over the drooping flags that draped the room, over the graceful pine boughs on the walls, over the long, shining floors that echoed to the feet of the dancers, and streamed out through the open willows in mellow bars of brightness on the deserted verandas. Edward Dennett, coming up from the mill, heard the delicious strains of music that floated out in little crashes of melody, and saw lithe forms float past the window in surprises of blue and white and pink, till he was fairly dazzled. As he passed through the hall to go to his room, he met Mr. Sevenoakes, radiant in evening dress, and with a countenance that fairly shone. "Why, hello, Dennett!" said the airy little man in surprise. "Are n't you participating in the pleasure this evening? Come along in and help with the lancers. We need somebody just your size. Why, see here, I 'm turning gray, yet I manage to do my share to amuse the girls."

"Quite likely. But I have to rise an hour or so earlier than you in the morning, Mr. Sevenoakes."

"O, that 's nothing, you will feel all the better for the diversion."

"Well, I will indulge, but it is dangerous to begin," he answered. After a time he appeared in the ball-room, and found Mabel dancing with a dashing young Englishman, a friend of the hotel-keeper, so he sat down and waited for the dance to end. Then he sought her as she talked with her loquacious partner.



the soft curves of which were dimly outlined, like the bright whiteness of a lily, in the faint light.

Now was the supreme moment. "Mabel," he said, leaning forward, and looking into her eyes with a new and glorious tenderness in his own, "I am going to tell you something to-night—" But familiar voices sounded near them, and George and Nellie passed the window and sat down by it to get a breath of the coolness of the night that stole in through the tangling vines. Something they were saying dissolved, like a rude awakening, the blissful mood that was over him. He could not utter another word, but sat spellbound, like a figure carved from marble.

"Mr. Knowles seems to be a good man," Nellie said; "and any one can see he is very fond of Mabel; but she is taken up just at present with my friend Edward. It's a pity, for he is too good and earnest to be trifled with, and Mabel never for a moment thinks of *him*. She has, of course, an ambition to satisfy, and her aunt is like unrelenting stone in her schemes, so *that* most certainly makes a doubly bad case out of it."

"Yes; but Mr. Knowles is not the only other admirer she has. You are aware, I presume, that I consider myself on the list, — of rejected ones, I fear, since she does not deign to come down off her stilts to notice me," said George.

"O well, woman-like, I suppose she thought the best conquest was where she might possibly have a rival," said Nellie, with a sigh that floated out through the window, and came back on the gently stirring breezes in mournful sobs. "It is the way of the world. One can cast aside another's bread of life."

Edward had waited a moment for Mabel to speak and refute the words that came so distinctly to them both. It had been a moment when his heart was stirred to its utmost feeling. He felt that she must know what he was about to say, and how impossible it was for him to proceed now. But she sat in silence, without a word. It was true, then, he thought, and she dared not tell him it was not, lest he would finish what he had commenced to say.

"Let us go back," he said, fearing to hear more. But Mabel shook her head and did not answer. A great lump had risen in her throat, and she could not utter a word for fear of sobbing. He paused a moment, and then remarked, "I fear you will be cold, Miss Willis. I think we had better go in now." His voice sounded naturally enough, and he felt a vague satisfaction, in the face of the deadliest pain he had ever known, that he had strength enough left to betray no emotion. She had choked back the rising flood of feeling now, and she answered steadily, if not calmly, "I wish to stay here. Please go and leave me"; and without a word he went, — not back into the ball-room, but off into the night, to walk about the shadowy, lonesome mill, and fight his misery-burdened thoughts. It did not seem possible to him that Mabel could be cold and heartless now, and yet she had rather listen to this talk they had overheard than to assure a friend of her sincerity and truth. Ah! this was something he could not answer, and which stung him almost to madness.

Meanwhile Mabel sat listening to his firm, departing footstep, while the unchecked tears splashed down upon

her snowy dress, and her thoughts were a chaos of regrets and tumultuous pain. What should she have said? She almost knew what Edward was going to say to her, but he had not said it. Could she be the first to declare her feelings toward him? And then she had been so stunned by the surprise of Nellie's utter falseness, and no less by Edward's abrupt change of manner, that her usual tact had deserted her entirely and left her overwhelmed. Presently some one closed the window behind her, and shut away the melodies that poured out through it; then the chains clashed silvery against the glass, and the shutters were closed also, and she was left in darkness and silence out there in the vines. But welcome, black stillness, for the tears were falling fast like rain, and a great agony was struggling in her heart. Long she sat there in the dense shadow, heeding not the distant voices breaking in upon her sorrow, nor the chill night-damp that pierced into her leafy retreat.

The honeysuckles threw her little wafts of perfume, and the breezes, that had made a sigh seem like a sob before, hovered about her with tender caresses, while they softened and stifled her sobs, by their musical, loving whispers, and their little singing voices in the vine-leaves.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE STRIKE.

**It is the flash which appears; the thunderbolt will follow. — VOLTAIRE.**

"No smoking in here, sir," said Edward Dennett, as he passed through the machinery-room a day or so after George had entertained the "boys," and saw a spiral cloud ascending from behind the great noisy mortar where Crane, the bushy-headed leader of laboratory fame, was enjoying himself with a cigarette. Coming back again, Edward found the atmosphere still redolent with the scents of tissue paper and tobacco, and the well-known rules of the place, as well as his late reminder, unheeded. His wrath was kindled. "Throw that cigarette away, and indulge in no more smoking during work hours!" he called out rather forcibly. The fellow still sat on an empty box with an insolent expression on his mud-bespattered face, but did not move, saying deliberately, with his cigarette still between his teeth, "When I ain't got much to do, I may as well enjoy myself as the next one a-goin'. I ain't doin' nothin' wrong."

"Throw that away, or I 'll give you something to do immediately!" said Edward, advancing with swift step.

The fellow rose and cast a furtive glance at the workmen who were closely watching proceedings and only making a pretence of going on with their work. "I

may give you somethin' to do yourself," said he in a low tone, as if afraid to utter the words aloud, but the cause of the dissension still remained in his mouth, scattering its noxious scent on the air.

"You may consider your services in this place at an end because of disobedience to rules," said Edward, sternly. His courage in this extremity was good, though it was the first time he had ever been met with open defiance. Still the man remained standing, and did not seem to notice what had been said. "You may go *now!*" said Edward, who stood apparently calm and cool, but whose wrath and indignation were each moment rising higher. The fellow at last walked away down the long room and stopped near the door to speak to a fellow-workman, still puffing his cigarette. After waiting a reasonable time, Edward walked over to where he stood and requested him to leave.

"I'm transactin' a little necessary business that I can't put off."

"Well, you *shall* put it off! You are disturbing the work here, as well as continuing to violate our rules."

"O, I know all about rules and work here. We understand what your position is"; and the burly Crane turned his back, as if ignoring all rules and work in the world, and went on with his talk. A swift flush swept over Edward's face, and his eyes flashed. He had hoped to avoid trouble, but he had seen from the first that it was almost inevitable, so now he hesitated no longer. Putting a firm hand on the fellow's collar, he gave a strong push, which sent cigarette and grimy-faced smoker reeling in different directions toward the door. Before the man recovered, Edward

had pushed him through it, for although no larger in stature, Edward was the stronger of the two. There was just a moment before he could succeed in getting back, when the infuriated miner rushed upon him with a glare like a madman, and seizing his arm, bit it with all the cruelty of a savage brute. Blinded with the pain, Edward dealt a blow on the bended head, that loosened the strong jaws and put an end to the strife, for the dazed Crane staggered off and showed no further fight that day.

Edward stood a moment to collect his thoughts, and then went back into the machinery-room, where he found the men standing in excited little groups, and talking in loud tones, but he only said calmly, "Now we will resume work," and took no further notice of them. His face was deathly pale, and his blue eyes flashed, but his manner was slow and dignified, and the men murmured their indignation from all quarters when he went out, because he had taken the matter so coolly. He walked to an empty car-shed, and sat down for a moment to fit himself to begin his work again. He looked at his watch,—it was five minutes past three. Then he sat and watched through the little windows the reddish haze creep in among the hills, and the tall pines nod slowly and glisten in the afternoon sunshine. A horseman riding along a distant hillside at last disappeared in the winding cañon below, and a flock of birds flying like dark specks against the pale blue sky drew near, and showed their pointed wings and their feathery forms distinctly. "I must be well rested now; I've been here nearly half an hour," he thought, as he pulled out his watch again, though feeling

strangely dizzy and sick. He had been there just five minutes. "I'm excited," he then thought; "this will be a hard day"; but he remembered his unfinished work, and rose to go, when something cold upon his hand caused him to look down, and lo! he saw it was half covered with blood. "The fellow's teeth did effective work that time," he said, as he took off his coat, and surveyed the wet crimson stain on his shirt sleeve. The flesh of his wrist was badly torn and mangled, and yet in his excitement he had felt no pain from it; only a strange dizziness and weary feeling. How could he go through the day with that wounded arm, and this faint sickness in his head? He was strong and young, yet could he bear it with unshrinking fortitude? But he bound the bleeding wound up tightly in his handkerchief, put on his coat again, and with determination on his face went back to his work. All through the long hours that followed, he bravely did his part, and kept order with a face so calm that no one even guessed how he was suffering.

That night was a restless one for Edward. A sense of impending calamity impressed him, and fitful slumbers brought him vague dreams of ghastly forms and fathomless pits, till he was glad when the gray dawn broke and brought back reality, which was sweet compared to that terrible night. As he breakfasted, George joined him at the table, and seemed in excellent spirits. "Hello, Ned!" he said pleasantly; "this is just the day for cleaning up. I'm glad you're out of work. Why, what's the matter with your hand? It's swollen and purple. Been around to the grindstone, I'll bet, and feel sorry enough now for it," he added, knowing well

the cause of the wound, and feeling triumphant and heartily glad that he had one revenge against his rival.

"No; some little trouble at the mill yesterday resulted in this for me. I thought you had heard about it."

"O yes, so I did; but I was not aware that you did not come out first best all around. Crane was going about last night with a swelled head and a woful story."

The words were like a stab to Edward. "There will be more trouble to-day," he thought, feeling helpless and disheartened with his wounded arm; and his countenance betrayed his unhappy thoughts. That look was a wonderful appetizer to George, who ate his breakfast with an increased relish, and felt keenly the pleasure of being in the ascendency, and victorious over one toward whom he entertained a deadly enmity. But this was not all; he was to have better satisfaction than that after a while.

"Got a match, Ned?" he inquired, as they rose to go, taking a cigar from his pocket.

Edward handed him his match-safe. "I must hurry off," he observed; "my time is up."

"That 's so, and I must see Sevenoakes," returned George, puffing his cigar, and putting the match-safe in his own pocket with a grim smile.

Edward entered the mill that morning as the whistle blew, and found the men all in their places and working quietly. A sigh of relief escaped him as he gave directions to the man near the door, who received them good-naturedly, and the busy mill stamped away, with its workmen all attentive to business and well behaved,

promising no further annoyance. He did not hear the loud laugh that followed his exit, and so the autumn sunshine borrowed a golden hue again, and the falling leaves their crimson dyes, while the hills swept clear-cut and bright in little protecting walls about him. Surely the world was not so dark as it had seemed to him this morning. The pain and excitement of yesterday had somewhat disturbed his strong, courageous spirit, and had brought him groundless fears and unrest. Coming up out of the shaft, the clear cool air revived him again, his recent troubles lost their grave importance, and his dismal forebodings vanished. He entered the mill with renewed trust in his workmen, and renewed courage. Passing through the long room, he examined the riffles and the sluice-boxes, and was ordering fresh ore into the huge, crunching jaws of the crusher, when he caught sight of Crane's head, appearing behind the mortar, bushy and unkempt as usual, but some of its expansiveness compressed into a smaller space by a wide white cloth that hinted strongly of liniment and vinegar.

"See here," said the indignant manager; "you were told to leave this mill yesterday. What do you mean by presenting yourself here again?"

"I was told to leave this here establishment, but I was also told to come back."

"*Who* told you to come back?"

"Sevenoakes," — deliberately spoken, with a sneer and a triumphant smile, after a slight pause, which was intended and served well to give the fellow's word greater emphasis.

A change passed over Edward's face. It was not

a look of suppressed and baffled rage, nor of forced concession, but an expression of unflinching anger. "Sevenoakes!" he repeated. "And *I* now tell you that you cannot remain."

"We'll see about that," said Crane, turning to his work with exasperating coolness, as if ready, for his part, to dismiss the matter for the time.

Edward took a step forward and stood before him. His manner was calmer now, but even more determined than before. "Must you have a repetition of yesterday's scene?" he asked. Crane evidently did not like the idea of it, for he softened somewhat, though looking around the room suggestively, as if expecting help in a crisis.

"Now, looky here, we might as well come to terms," he said. "Sevenoakes sent me back, and promised us that we don't have to submit to no kind of tyranny at all. Sevenoakes is a *man*, by thunder! Now, we don't none of us want to do nothin' to you. You just go along and behave, and we'll all do our work, and min' our own business too. But if you go to makin' a muddle, and if Sevenoakes goes back on us, we've all decided on a course of action that'll mighty soon bring you both back to terms. We've stood it long enough, — so long that we did n't know enough to help ourselves until somebody tol' us how it looked to be kicked aroun'. We've been blamed fools not to stick up for our rights before; but you ken bet we're a-goin' to do it now, by thunder, every last one of us! I'm here by order of Sevenoakes, *and here I stay!*"

"I will wait just long enough to explain that you can come here by no one's order except mine. Mr. Seven-

oakes has no authority to send you here except through me. He has given me entire control, and cannot interfere in the least without revoking my authority. And so you may as well consider yourself here without right, and leave the mill. I will settle the matter with Mr. Sevenoakes afterward; but in the mean time, and while I remain here, I will recognize no one's right to interfere with my work, or dictate to my workmen. That is all you need to understand about it. You already know that I have told you to leave the place."

Edward's last words died away in resonant, clear echoes in the hollow, arched roof above them. The mill had ceased its heavy stamping, the wheels were motionless, and the broad belts trembled and swayed a little, but showed their seams distinctly where a few minutes before the white stitches had blended indistinguishably in the flying lines of brown. The workmen had all left their duties, and stood around in little groups intently watching the affair, but making no comment upon it to each other, as if their course of action had been previously planned. There was a pause. No one stirred, and no sound was heard except the clear splashing of the stream from the water-pipes into the mortar, and the low gurgle as it rippled away through the long sluices.

Then the door opened suddenly, letting in a flood of pale golden sunshine across the floor, and Mr. Sevenoakes stood on the threshold. His face wore its usual bright expression, and his manner was as airy and conciliatory as ever, though he took in the whole scene at a glance, and knew that serious trouble was brewing. He did not affect ignorance, yet he was somewhat taken

back at this turn of affairs. That little round head, which shone as glossily in the broad sheet of morning sunshine as the tall black beaver upon it, had knowledge of human nature too deep for such a course. "Good morning, Mr. Dennett," he said carelessly. "No steam on to-day, I see. I meant to see you the first thing this morning; so I came down to let you know before going to my office." And he took out a bunch of keys, every one of which was as neat and bright as the little man who held them.

"Would it incommode you much to come now? I can easily see it would be more satisfactory to you in the end"; and he glanced significantly around as if he understood perfectly the meaning of the idle mill.

Edward faced the little man squarely. There was an expression of determination and firm resolve in his face that was not lost on the attentive workmen around him, and it caused a momentary sensation. Not a few of the waiting miners hoped for a collision, and yet until this juncture they had scarcely looked for it, knowing well that Edward Dennett would not take an unfair advantage through physical means, even when his adversary had availed himself of as mean a one in other respects, and deserved to be punished for it. "First," he said, "I wish you to decide, before I attend to any other business in connection with this work, whether or not I am to be subjected to the annoyance and inconvenience of having some one interfere with my management; I cannot consent—"

"O well, come up into my office and we will have a talk," interrupted the superintendent.

"A talk is unnecessary, Mr. Sevenoakes. I want a

distinct understanding right here before these workmen; it requires no talk to arrange that. I absolutely refuse to continue work without it,—I absolutely refuse to accept any settlement that does not clearly and unequivocally and publicly define my position to be what it was at first."

Mr. Sevenoakes was surprised. He could not quite understand this young man's straightforward disposition. Most decidedly this was not what the little shuttle would have done. He did not quite like to have any one take so firm a stand, although he himself was as set in his notions as Edward. He usually accomplished his ends by swaying back and forth, compromising, arranging, or conceding, and yielding up everything except the main object in view. But he decided to try the power of his oily tongue before consenting to Edward's terms. He could pretend he had interests at stake if everything else failed. "O yes, we will fix everything right, of course; and it shall be arranged where you wish. If you insist on having the thing done here, then here it will be. But, Mr. Dennett, you will surely listen to reason. You do not wish to expose all our business relations; but they certainly will be made public if you require an unconditional settlement immediately. I have something to say to you that is quite indispensable to a satisfactory conclusion of the matter. I have rights, too, Mr. Dennett. And so I will ask you as a gentleman to postpone this open adjustment, and consent to a few minutes' private conversation. It need not alter your position in the least. We will return here under the same conditions after our talk, if you wish it."

Edward felt that if it could do no harm nor alter his position he might as well grant the importunate little man the interview, so he followed him out of the door, and the two men started up the slope to the office.

The men left in the mill disposed of themselves, with as much comfort as possible, on empty boxes and against slanting timbers. Crane looked after the two men for a minute, and then unconsciously feeling of his sore head, turned to his companions and said: "Sevenoakes is a-goin' to threaten him and bring him to terms, by golly! He 's mighty independent, and he will get kicked out if he ain't pretty durn careful, you ken bet yer boots! Yer see, Sevenoakes don't dare to do it right here. Dennett would give him the durndest lickin' he ever took if he did." And in this solution of the matter the rest acquiesced, and each man felt himself very smart and very important, and took a profound delight in looking at the idle wheels around him. As for Crane, he expanded into the most distinguished, liberal-minded man in the place; *he* was working a thorough revolution in affairs, *he* was a brilliant example to his fellows, and *he* was emancipating them from their former oppression, and had caused this important break in the monotonous round of business. Calmly he sat and awaited the issue, seeming quite content to beguile away the time with a cigarette and the thought that he had solid backing in a combination that could prevail against both manager and superintendent together.

Mr. Sevenoakes unlocked his office door with some misgivings. This young man he had undertaken to subdue was a very determined one. It was doubtful

which would come out victorious, and the thought of defeat was not the most pleasant to his precious little vanity.

"Take a chair, Mr. Dennett," he said, with his customary cordiality, while he raised the green curtain and helped himself to a comfortable seat. "Now, the truth of this business we are to talk over is this: I heard about some little fuss at the mill yesterday, which of itself, of course, don't amount to that"; and he emphasized his speech with a very graceful snap of his white fingers.

"Pardon me," said Edward, "it does amount to something more. I've got a disabled arm for it, sir."

"O, indeed, have you? I did n't know that. How did you come by it?"

"The fellow, who resisted until he had to be forcibly ejected, used his teeth with some effect," said the younger man, showing his purple wrist.

"Well, well, that 's bad. As I was going to say, these mill hands are violent fellows. They resort to forcible measures to get satisfaction for everything. In reality, we are somewhat in their power. If the whole lot should resist us, then of course we would be without remedy, and would have to give in on their terms. The matter came to me last night through Brooklyn. He understands pretty clearly the state of feeling among the men, and advised me as to the best course to pursue. It seems this Crane, who caused the trouble, went around exciting sympathy by his lame jaw, and stirring up dissension and no little excitement. The only thing we could do under the circumstances was to set him to work again, and give his idle hands some-

thing to do, for he was bent on creating mischief, and threatening things he had the power to accomplish. I meant to see you the first thing this morning, but with my usual luck I overslept. It seems now to be far more wise to use conciliatory measures, and allow the men a little freedom, so that they will imagine they are having their own way, and feel better satisfied. Don't you agree?" and the neat-clothed, sleek little personage faced the magnificent man before him with a face so beaming and full of enthusiasm that he felt he had already won the day. However, it only required a moment for him to discover his error.

"I do *not* agree," answered Edward, calmly but decidedly. "It is true, we have not been through all the experience of a long-established company, and yet we have been at work for some time,—long enough to discover the best methods of conducting the business. A little freedom to such men as the mill hands would utterly destroy all control over them; they would become overbearing and quarrelsome to such an extent that they could not by any possibility be managed. Our rules are in no way oppressive; the men are well treated and not overworked. To utterly merge all restraint and regulation into each man's individual whims or ideas would result in complete anarchy and confusion. However, I have no objection, if you wish to try the experiment. My own personal opinion will by no means interfere with your success in it. But I do have the most strenuous objections if you wish to control in any degree my workmen except with my knowledge. I will not submit to it, sir. I should be entirely helpless to accomplish anything either for you

or myself. And I will not undertake the matter. I may as well tell you plainly that I do not think you had the right to send back a discharged workman without consulting me, whatever may have been your reasons; and I absolutely refuse to continue in the employ of this company in my present capacity unless the men distinctly understand there is no appeal to any higher authority against me. You have ample means of ascertaining my methods of conducting affairs, and of judging whether I am a proper person to be intrusted with the authority bestowed upon me. If at any time you are dissatisfied, or see cause to interfere with my management, I claim the right to be personally notified of it, and to have the opportunity either to defend myself, or at least to understand what is required of me."

Mr. Sevenoakes was uneasy. He did not like this plain talk. If Edward had used a little polite flattery, and had made some pretence of docility, he would have yielded much more readily. As it was, he was angry, though he controlled himself so well that Edward noticed no sign of it, except that the words slipped along his oily tongue more glibly than usual..

"You do not understand me, Mr. Dennett," he said. "Nothing has been done without consulting you. I meant to explain about Crane the first thing this morning. It is not my intention to cramp your powers in any way; but we may as well take counsel as to the best mode of taming down these men when they get restless. Now we will go back to the mill and tell Crane that he can stay if he behaves himself hereafter, and I guess he will be glad enough to do it. And in other ways we will use conciliatory measures until the

hands are somewhat mollified, and are content to go on with their business, and fight about their cards instead of their work."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Sevenoakes. The men do not have to find something to fight about. They are peaceable when a proper restraint is put upon them. The miners here are ignorant fellows, most of them, and love to feel a little power, but they are insubordinate to an exasperating degree if they are not held to strict obedience. These fellows are unlike other workmen; they are accustomed to an atmosphere of excitement and violence, and they are ever ready for a chance to exercise their belligerent proclivities. In other fields of labor the workmen can be allowed freedom and privileges, and they receive them with gentlemanly appreciation, while they never seek to take unfair advantage. The only way to keep peace here is to give the hands no opportunity to fight. I shall not consent to keep Crane in the mill, if I remain,— not because of any stubborn will, but because I realize fully that by doing so I shall lose all control over the men, and be powerless to accomplish any work or keep up a uniform system of labor."

The superintendent felt it useless to argue, but still he did not give up without a stormy discussion. He did not mention to Edward that George had given him something more than a cigar the evening before. That young man was quite expert at giving hints. There had been a long talk, with frequent mention of Edward on George's part, — and they were not the most complimentary, — and some strong suggestions thrown out that frightened the little superintend-

ent considerably. He entertained a warm friendship for George, and confidence in his opinions, yet he felt himself helpless to continue the work without Edward. However, he resolved to rid himself of that independent fellow, represented as domineering and unnecessarily severe, as soon as he was able.

Finally, however, Mr. Sevenoakes was compelled to yield in order to retain Edward. The two went back to the mill, but the superintendent was as bright and as cheerful as ever, and the mill hands could not detect any sign that showed how indignant he really was.

"I did not quite understand this case," he said to the men in his usual good-natured tone; "it was misrepresented to me, but I see it differently now. Crane will have to settle with Mr. Dennett if he wishes to remain in the mill. I am sure everything can be fixed all right, though. I do not wish any one to bring his grievances to me hereafter, unless they are of a very serious nature. Then I will give you a hearing, and decide it in the presence of Mr. Dennett. Such differences will never arise if each one does faithfully the work required of him, and attends to his own affairs. I wish you all success and good morning"; and the little man was gone as suddenly as he had come.

"Now we will start up the mill," said Edward to his men. "Crane, you have just heard that your indorsement from outside sources cannot avail here. I will not permit you to remain, unless you apologize for your past conduct."

Crane passed his hand through his bushy hair, or at least so much of it as was not bound down tightly with the white cloth, and by this act was unpleasantly reminded of his late conflict.

"I'd like to see myself apolergize to you," he said, with a sneer. "There's other ways I ken use to git back here when you yerself are kicked out. I ken let yer know afore long who's who"; and the slouching figure of Crane disappeared where a few minutes before Mr. Sevenoakes's trim black coat had caught on its velvety, dustless surface the rays of the autumn sun.

"You can give us some steam now," said Edward, pleasantly, turning to the engineer.

"You ken give it to yerself, fur all me," he returned, insolently. "We don't none of us intend to do another lick o' work until you take back our pardner, and express yerself sorry fur the way you've been actin'. Do you hear what we say? That's what we're a-goin' to do right from the word Go." The men moved close together, some took their coats and hats, and they all started to the door. Before opening it, the engineer turned and called out, "Will yer give in now? We'll all come back an' pitch in if yer promise to have no more o' yer tyranny a-goin' on."

Edward turned indignantly away. He realized that some evil influence was at work against him, and that the men had been encouraged to acts of resistance. This he felt was the last day of his rule in the busy quartz-mill, and yet he knew that if Mr. Sevenoakes would have patience and allow him to pursue his own course, work would soon be progressing as finely as before, and the men would have something to remember which would deter them from any similar behavior in the future. A calm waiting for them to come back, while ignoring their conduct and finding recruits to fill the

vacant places, would soon accomplish what neither conciliatory measures nor open warfare could do.

Mr. Sevenoakes from his office window saw the small army sally out of the wide door and start off toward the little town. "Dennett is satisfied now, I hope," he said to himself. "He has proved his experiment, and will be willing to try mine when the mischief is done"; and he scowled so darkly that the little clock, so like himself, seemed to grow less bright, and tick as busily as the little man's thoughts. He did not realize that his open friendship for George Brooklyn had greatly furthered the latter's secret plots.

Edward stood alone in the deserted mill. Here day after day he had seen the busy wheels buzz round and had listened to the noisy, restless stamps; here he had seen pictures of Mabel's sweet face in the mirrors of the bubbling waters and above the white gravel in the dripping sluices; here he had felt an innocent, almost boyish pride in this the first realization of his ambition and his hopes; and here he had gained little victories that were inseparably associated with every nook and corner of the quiet place. It was all over,—all a wreck now; he had nothing to cling to, nothing to comfort him. But he still had hope for the future, and strength to fight his way; he still had a conscience free and guiltless, and his own upright soul to keep him company;—so he was not altogether alone in the deserted mill.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE GHOST IN THE ROSE ARBOR.

The guilty is he who meditates a crime. — ALFIERI.

EDWARD DENNETT went to the superintendent's office for the second time that day, but with his convictions unaltered. Mr. Sevenoakes expected to see him willing to admit his error, and express himself ready to adopt almost any method of settlement. Instead, he maintained that the affair would work itself out all right if no notice were taken of the men. "Mr. Sevenoakes," he said, with much decision, "I offer to surrender my position willingly to any one who wishes to submit to the terms presented. For my own part, I cannot regret the extreme to which my course has led, knowing full well that any other course would involve like complications and harsh measures in the end. Let me go, or give me power to restore order, as I believe it can be accomplished."

Mr. Sevenoakes was burning with anger. "There is the mill idle," he thought, "with loads of ore above surface waiting to be crushed, and yet this supreme donkey advocates delay. We will have to work night and day for a week to catch up if we do as he proposes, and George maintains that the men will never yield at all." Yet he would not trust himself to speak. He wanted time to investigate and think it over.

"Well, give me a chance to consider," he replied. "Let the matter stand till to-morrow. I will see you

then, and we will arrange it finally. To-morrow morning I will be down at the mill, and then perhaps we will think best to call up the men with the whistle, and threaten them,—or something. Let it go till then."

Edward felt content to wait. He had a strong hope that Mr. Sevenoakes would change his mind and agree cheerfully to the inconvenience that was inevitable. He was even grateful for the rest, for his wounded arm was painful, and his wakeful night had left him weary and faint. A part of the day he spent at the mill, and in the afternoon he rode out to his mother's,—because he expected sympathy in his trouble, and because his heart longed for the things he loved best, and needed new inspiration. Of Mabel he had not dared to think. He had tried to put her out of his thoughts and forget her; he had tried to call her a memory, and nothing more; but sometimes when they met, her gentle face spoke to him of her truth and sincerity, and made him forget that he had found her to be trifling and frivolous.

Still he avoided her, and they had never met alone since that night when they parted so unhappily in the veranda. Nellie rejoiced that her scheme had been successful in part at least. She waited for the time when Edward would have forgotten his fancy, and then she herself would comfort him and teach his heart to love her. She could wait. She understood Edward perfectly when he grew impatient while she spoke of the follies and ambitions that cast aside the costliest pearls of life for the sake of the vain frivolities. She knew that his heart had received a deadly thrust. It needed no second wound. He was thinking of

Mabel's heartlessness and her ambition. He would not seek to win an empty, soulless happiness from her.

Dark as life seemed to Edward this day, he felt that his troubles at the mill were by no means the greatest he had to bear. Let his heart but feel the bliss and the hope it had once known, grant him but the encouragement and comfort of a changeless love, and he was strong to face this misfortune with a calm and trustful spirit. But these golden times were over for him, he thought. In an hour when his heart was unguarded, he had surrendered its most sacred treasures to a careless hand. He must bear the consequences as best he could.

The next morning the sun rose behind a vail of dim gray cloud, and cast a mystic, faded splendor over the gleaming line of snowy peaks whitening in the eastern horizon, and dulled the rich, deep blue of the distant mountain folds. The winds sighed with a new disquietude through the wild oats, and moaned in the tossing branches with a tearless sorrow. Nellie awoke with her busy mind full of plans, and began early in the day to execute them. She had a short interview with George, and then sought Mabel, who was busy in her own room arranging a mass of crimson, yellow, and shaded russet-brown leaves between the pages of an old book. The two girls had been slightly estranged since that evening which Mabel had cause to remember so well. She could not trust herself to speak of it, yet she believed that Nellie had done her that wrong knowingly and wilfully.

"O, Mab," said Nellie, enthusiastically, slipping into the room. "Put up your dry leaves and all your nonsense, and listen to a real something, — none of your

old pressed atoms and relics of the past in this. That strike in the mill has made plenty of leisure for busy hands, and a glorious opportunity for us. George Brooklyn has invited us to ride with him over to see the cave on the mountain-side, and the strange pictures on the rock-wall made by the water stains. This is our last chance, I know, for your aunt threatens every day to make us go home by next stage. I would n't miss it for anything. We 've been here the whole summer, and yet have never seen the most interesting sight in these old hills. Why, I remember years ago that I was perfectly delighted with the cave, and I was familiar enough surely with the grandeur of nature here. My horrible enemy, the poison-oak, is chilled and paralyzed now, — leaves loose, and turning yellow, and red-tipped with coming death, — and I can go in safety and comfort. Really, we will have a most charming ride through the autumn woods."

"But, Nellie, I do not think — " began Mabel.

"You do not think you can stay, I know. It is settled. Your aunt says yes to the proposition"; and Nellie glided away to tell George he must have the horses ready early in the afternoon.

Mabel did not want to go. But she had almost given up the hope that Edward would ever forgive her for her silence. What mattered it, then, where she went? or whether the woods were brown and naked, or gorgeous with frost-painted leaves and bronze-green mosses? All life had lost its beauty and sunshine.

They rode away in the early afternoon, but before they had proceeded far, Nellie's horse obstinately ran under a tree and tore her hat into a crownless mass of

straw. "I must go back," she said; "I would n't for anything go to the cave with such a head-gear"; and no persuasions were of any avail to induce her to continue on her way. But when Mabel expressed her intention to return also, Nellie grew suddenly very unselfish, and insisted on having the others go to the cave, and bring back a good report of it to compensate her for her disappointment. Finding these arguments useless, she finally promised to get another hat and overtake them if they would ride along slowly.

She took good care not to overtake them, however. After a short gallop along the road where George and Mabel had disappeared, she returned to the hotel and watched for a glimpse of Edward. It scarcely mattered much, however, for her plans were working in another direction. "He will surely see them as they return, and think that Mabel has already forgotten him," she thought. "Then he will be anxious to show that he too can forget, and will come to me. And when he does, *I will never let him go.*"

Nellie spent her afternoon indolently in her parlor, writing letters, and dozing catlike on her soft-cushioned lounge. The hours wore along in unbroken quiet, but the stillness was at length disturbed by a musical yet excited voice rising from the corridors below. Then came a rush and a rustle up the stairs, toward Nellie's door, which finally opened, revealing Nita, sparkling in her jetted grenadine, with large, dilated eyes, and deep, burning color, standing on the threshold. "O, I thought it was something like you, — nothing else but a hurricane would come rushing around like that," called Nellie's voice lazily from the lounge.

"I wish I *was* a hurricane!" cried Nita, coming into the room. "I'd tear you to pieces! You are the woman who watched me in the pine woods, and met me so brazenly to show me that you knew my secret. What care I? Nothing, because *you* know it. You have no more meetings to watch now, I suppose you know. He will not come for fear you will be angry. But you shall not use your knowledge to keep him away from me, and threaten to expose me to my father, that you may have him yourself. He is afraid that you will do it, and that I will have to suffer through his doing. But *I* am not afraid. Tell anything you know, I do not care! It could do no more than your threats have done already."

"Ha, ha! foolish girl," said Nellie. "It is not I who alienates the affections of your love. Perhaps you have not seen the beauty of the season. If you had, you would know the story. She has turned the heads of half the old miners, not to mention the men here at the hotel, who get a chance to speak to her. What do you suppose would be likely to follow when a man who has the capacity to fall in love every half-hour is encouraged by such a girl? He is desperately infatuated. He has only been amusing himself with you. It must be so, or he would never be so attentive to some one else."

Nellie's quick wit knew this was a good opportunity to further her own ends. To rouse Nita's jealousy, and make her quarrel with George, would induce him to seek all the more for Mabel's favor. Even if hopeless, he would perhaps prefer to try the experiment of playing the rejected and heart-broken lover, if every other

resource had failed, and he had no other opportunity to flirt. Besides, she desired to enlighten Nita as to the truth, and awaken her anger, for the sake of gaining her confidence. Nita no doubt had opportunities to learn of the troubles at the mill, and the causes of it; it might be she would reveal what she knew to Nellie.

But Nita's thoughts were far from the troubles at the mill. She sat with blanched cheeks and wondering eyes, all her old fire and passion quenched, looking hopelessly but appealing into Nellie's face. "He *cannot* be amusing himself with me!" she said, with stony despair. "You do not know how true he seems to me. I do not believe it!" But her looks showed how far the awful fear possessed her.

"O, you don't, eh?" said Nellie, seeming to grow indifferent. "Well, your faithful George is out this very minute making love to our handsome Mabel."

"Mabel!" repeated Nita, as if the thought had dazed her. "Oh, no! it is not *that* girl!" she cried, her thoughts coming back and bringing a ray of hope. "She is not cruel enough to take him away from me; she looks so gentle and sweet."

"O yes, that is what they all say. But they get fooled. Men always think a beautiful woman is good. It is because beauty is the physical expression of sweetness and innocence. It is because her face looks as if she were good and true, that they cannot believe she is not. They do not know that beauty often hides a hideously ugly soul."

"O, but I don't believe she could be so cruel as to do that, — when she has everything, and I have nothing."

"She does not know that she is taking him from any one, you simpleton. I never told her that George had a sweetheart whom he met in the woods. *He* is the one to blame. He is trifling with you to please his own vanity. It is fine sport for him to make you love him, but he is deceiving you with his stories and his flattery; his promises are nothing. That ring," said Nellie, pointing contemptuously to a little gold circlet on Nita's brown hand,—"take it off and stamp it under foot. It is a pledge of lies,—nothing else. He has no shame. He glories in his conquests, and loves to have a pretty little story for his friends when he is in the mood. Throw it away, and then go and assure yourself that I tell you the truth. He and Mabel have been out riding all the afternoon. You will see them coming home along the road from the old mines if you watch."

Nita rose to go. Her face was strangely altered in its distorted whiteness, and she gave Nellie one last look, as if mutely appealing to be told that her pain was needless,—that what she had heard was untrue,—but she saw it was in vain. She closed the door carefully, and was gone with silent step along the hall. The servants peeped slyly at her as she descended the stairs, and tittered and whispered that she had changed her tune since last they saw her, but she knew it not.

Along the broad highway that led in curving sweeps across the hills she hurried, caring not that the deep red dust rose up in little clouds about her, and soiled the silky folds of her precious dress, or that a crowd of idle miners watched and made coarse comments on her impatient haste. The blackened, riven roofs of the

old town at last appeared in sight, with the long road winding out beyond, its course unbroken by the forms of horsemen outlined darkly against its bright track, and only dotted here and there with little bevies of birds,—the swift-footed quail and the wild dove running up and down and across it, leaving little star-like imprints of their feet in the gleaming dust. Then Nita ceased her hurried gait, stopping to brush the bottom of her dress, and to gather here and there from the dry, trodden grass at the roadside some downy seeds of the dandelion, and a few hard, crackling heads of scented sunflower, then idly continuing her way until she reached the dilapidated houses and neglected gardens of the old town. All the lumber not worm-eaten and decayed had been taken to Lucky Streak by the new builders, and so there stood here falling houses, doomed to be doorless because these carefully secured protectors had wholly failed to keep grim poverty from entering or the trustful dwellers from going out; and pointed roofs, shattered and warped, lying flat on the ground like the low, broad wigwams of the Indians. Nita wandered along aimlessly, picking leaves from the long branches in the tangled gardens, and gathering pebbles and pieces of broken crockery, in a bewildered sort of way, looking often up the red, rocky road with weary eyes, as if dreading to see the objects for which she watched. The fury of her sorrow had left her confused and weak. Her heart was numbed to that blind agony of anger that had moved it at first so deeply, and she waited patiently until the sun sank down in a gorgeous bank of clouds behind the purple line of hills, and the twilight was coming fast into the *lowlands.*

Then suddenly came the sound of voices and the clatter of ringing hoofs, and looking up she saw George and Mabel riding on a slow trot along the road. They were talking carelessly, but presently Mabel reined in her horse to get a better view of the old church, with its sagging doors and roofless walls, its white, stainless altar under the blue dome of heaven, never lighted now but with the rays of the far-off stars, and wet only with the pure, clear tears of the rain-clouds. Willows drooped, long-leaved and mournful, beside the walls, yielding now and then their tress-like branches to the winds that tossed them in through the arched window-holes, and scattered their loose yellow leaves over the deserted pews and into the silent aisles.

At length the two rode on again in silence, while Nita concealed herself in an old falling arbor covered with a thick mass of climbing roses, and awaited their approach. Now the dead torpor of her wrath was roused afresh. Her heart beat wildly with a deep, suffocating pain, that seemed to take away her breath and crush out all the lingering hopes that she had cherished. A fierce jealousy burned in her brain with an ungovernable madness. She peered out from her leafy hiding-place, with eyes that shone like gems, and watched the man to whom she had given all her strongest, deepest love, for whom she had forgotten the holiest of vows, to whom she looked for everything her heart loved best, — she watched him turn with looks of admiration upon the fair girl who rode beside him, and saw his face shine with a love-light it had never worn before; and then she knew that her poor erring heart had been deceived, and had met the penalty for its wayward sin.

A demon tempted her tortured conscience as she looked at Mabel, and she drew out of her bosom a little silvery dagger and held it convulsively in her plump brown hand. She would surely end it if her fears came true. This must some time be the deliverance from her torturing woes.

Did George mentally compare that dark-faced rider who had left a picture in his mind, one cold spring night on the rocky hill in the blaze of the dim stage-lamps, her face full of uncurbed anger and almost savage beauty, with this refined girl who rode beside him now, cultivated though not affected in her easy, careless grace, handsome in her dark green riding-dress relieved by a plumy spike of golden-rod, and with a face that was fair and lovely, and softened and gentle in every line?

As the riders drew near the old arbor, Mabel espied the tangled roses over it, bright here and there with clusters of shining, scarlet seed-buds. She was thinking of another ride she had taken through this old abandoned town, one that had returned to her memory in after days with a sacred meaning, — a remembrance fondly cherished of the day when she first met some one who had woven a spell into the whole of her quiet life. Why not gather a branch as a memento of that happy time when she had seen it full of wild and fragrant bloom? The summer had gone, and her dream was over; soon winter's noiseless footsteps would be coldly whitening on the summits, and stealing down the purple avenues in tracks of gleaming snow; and then she would go away, perhaps never to return to this country that had seen the blossoming and the withering

of her tenderest hopes. In her far-away city home would she not love to see it, — a little leafy spray that grew where the steep heights looked down upon it in approving majesty, and sent its breath from the cool, clear air around their pure white crowns, where the red-gold sunlight, breaking in through the pine-fringed gateways of the east, had coaxed it into seas of tender bloom, and in a spot where she had spent one long, sweet season that would haunt all her life with its fond but mournful memories?

She stopped her horse and looked at George. "I want a branch of that rose vine," she said. "Will you help me down?"

"Ah! allow me to get it for you," said the gallant George, springing off and handing her his horse's rein.

"You would never be able to please me. It must be very choice, and I must pick it myself," said Mabel, pleasantly.

George helped her with an air of fond solicitude, setting her lightly and carefully down in the grass, out of the dust, and then stood holding their horses and watching her with admiring eyes. His face was never handsomer than it looked in that soft twilight radiance, and his voice was never richer or more tender than when he called out to Mabel to beware of the ghosts that walked about in the old ruins. Nita's heart thrilled anew, in spite of all its pain, at the sound, while a fierce desperation seized her, and she looked at Mabel, who was picking her way daintily through the dry, dusty grass to the arbor, her long skirt gathered up in her hands, and her head bent as if she were thinking gravely. The little dagger gleamed

again, and mirrored in its shining blade the dark face above it in all its distorted madness.

There was no rustle behind the broken lattice-work of the arbor as Mabel drew near, and Nita watched breathlessly till the little gloved hand should reach up to gather her chosen rose spray.

Still the gentle face was not raised upward, and Mabel stood a moment looking vacantly into the luxuriant mass of interwoven branches, with folded hands, while a faint sigh escaped her lips. Nita was ready. But when Mabel raised her eyes and lifted her hand, heedless of thorns, to gather a cluster she had selected, two dewy tears fell flashing from her eyes, and lay quivering like liquid diamonds on the rose-leaves. And then the dark face, with all the horror and cruelty of murder in it, changed, and softened with wonder and pity, while the little dagger fell crushing and rustling through the matted vines, and lay forgotten on the dry brown earth beneath. "She loves him too," whispered Nita to herself; "and she is good"; while Mabel started back in alarm, and stood a little distance from the arbor, looking steadily toward it, her rose spray trembling in a hand that trembled too.

"What is it?" asked George, throwing the horses' reins over a leaning stake by the roadside, and hurrying up to Mabel; "have you seen the ghosts I warned you against?"

"It is nothing, I guess. Something stirred in the leaves, — a bird, perhaps," said Mabel.

Nita realized that she would be discovered, and she knew not what excuse to give; but with the boldness of desperation she came out of her hiding-place and stood

before them, looking strangely haggard and frightened. "O, it is only that black-eyed girl whose father works in the mill," said George, as he saw her, glancing quickly away and turning to go. Of all ghosts, he did not want this one to rise and haunt him now. Mabel looked up too, and saw Nita leaning against the cracking lattice-work. She greeted the girl with a rare, sweet smile, and said pleasantly, "Good evening, Nita. Our meeting was rather too sudden, I think. We were both surprised and a little frightened. This is such a gloomy place, it is easy to imagine a host of terrors in every sound."

"Yes," faltered Nita, standing in blank recklessness, and watching for a glance from George. But he did not look again.

Helping Mabel to her saddle with a manner slightly changed, and more hurried than when he lifted her down, and springing on to his own horse, they started away. "It is getting late," he said. "We must ride briskly, or we 'll be absent at table."

"We 'll soon be there," said Mabel; "it is only a short way beyond the hill"; and with a pleasant look over her shoulder toward Nita, and a parting smile, she was galloping down the dusty road.

A groan burst from Nita's lips as she turned away, after watching with strained eyes the two dark forms till they vanished over the hill. The night seemed gathering fast around, and with a violent, restless bitterness in her soul, she started up swiftly to return home. Through dense thickets that tore her dress and scratched her face she hurried; into dark, unfrequented woods scarcely lighted by the late, fading twi-

light; and across dry old creek channels, forsaken by the rushing waters, stony, and whitened with bleached water weeds, and dotted with darkling pools in every deep basin of their wayward windings. She was crossing a little opening in the woods, where her footsteps were retarded by the deep, matted wild oats that rustled and gave out a rich yet dusty odor, when the form of a man appeared among the trees toward which she was hastening. He scanned her a moment in surprise, then he paused, standing boldly in her path, while a smile brightened his face. He did not speak for fear of startling her, yet he regretted this, for when she caught sight of him she uttered a scream and threw up her hands as if she had met a ghost. Still she knew him. "John, O John!" she cried, gazing upon him with a half-wild, half-shy look in her dark eyes, and her voice was scarcely more than a whisper when she added "My husband!" and shrunk back in dismay.

# CHAPTER XVIII.

## ONE NIGHT AROUND THE MILL.

I am sorry for thee, friend.
SHAKESPEARE.

ALL day a ghostly silence reigned over the motionless mill, from which the busy throngs had fled, and over the quiet, lifeless town, while the singing pines made a weird, prophetic musing in their tossing crests, and the leafy boughs shook down their red-tinged robes of autumn as if wont to cast their brightness to the frowning earth. A red haze lingered in the hills, and draped with purplish folds the distant peaks of snow; and in the still air seemed the mournful calling of an unknown voice, blasting the hope of life, and tainting all with the cankering touch of despair.

Mr. Sevenoakes did not keep his word. Edward saw him and his adviser George setting out quite early to the former's "sanctum," engaged in earnest conversation. Neither of them looked toward the mill, where Edward waited. After an hour or so of counsel giving and receiving, the younger man came out, but Mr. Sevenoakes made no appearance. Edward knew that trouble was brewing, and that his hopes of settlement were defeated. He was wholly without friends, without power. The thought came to him with more pain than he had imagined he could feel at the loss of his position, and the disgrace in this instance attending it.

But still he waited, though unrewarded for his patience. From that little green-curtained window of "the office" seemed to come a deadly, silent fire of destruction that was more forcible and more awful than even the volleys of an enemy's ranks. As up and down with restless step and throbbing head the troubled manager walked through the deserted building, over and over again he looked from the frozen machinery of toil, in a blind, dazed way, to see if a sound of life were stirring, but he saw always the closed door and the dark, liquid-looking window-panes, without even a breath of change save when the afternoon sun broke through the cloudy skies and a slant ray of light swept across the clear glass. Then the green curtain was pulled down farther by an unseen hand, and all was quiet as before. Still he kept up his walk in the desolate place, — into the laboratory, into the machinery-room, often glancing through the windows at the office, toward the town, and up at the great hotel, where the broad windows shone and blinked like yellow eyes in the afternoon sun.

He was bending over the great crusher and extracting bits of broken ore when the party of three set out on their ride to the cave, and so he did not see them depart; nor did he see them return, for at that time he was looking gloomily out of the western window at the faded sunset clouds that pictured many groups of fiery islands afloat in dim gray seas. Nellie counted too confidently on the success of her plan. He did not have this seeming confirmation of her words spoken that evening by the window to add to his unhappy thoughts.

When evening drew near, and still the superintendent did not pay his promised visit, Edward left the mill to

call the watchman who had served the night before, and on his way he stopped at the office. Mr. Sevenoakes was still there. "Come in, Mr. Dennett," he said rather coldly, with a lustreless stare from his depthless eyes.

"You did not call down at the mill as you agreed," Edward said, coldly also, standing near the door; "I came to see if you have decided yet." He performed his unpleasant errand as shortly as possible. Not for the world would he cringe and flatter for the sake of mollifying the little man's ruffled temper. He would stand on his own merits, he would maintain his own dignity at the cost of absolute defeat.

"It is a difficult thing to decide, Mr. Dennett, when the course you have insisted on taking bids fair to ruin us. I have decided this much, however, — that we are in imminent danger of being mobbed, or forcibly compelled to yield to the men. The shaft hands are already in a ferment. They are ripe for mischief now; it is give in or take the consequences, — that I am sure of. How, then, am *I* to adjust the matter, when neither side will make the least concession. I am powerless unless some one will take the first move toward reconciliation. It is all right for the participants in the quarrel, of course; they have no property at stake, no business suffering, and so they can afford to fight it out, and use other men's means with which to do it."

"Have you seen any manifestations of violence, Mr. Sevenoakes?" asked Edward, feeling it useless now to discuss matters while Mr. Sevenoakes was so disturbed as to use the sarcasm which he had just employed.

"Manifestations! Why, I hear of threats and the

like, that ought to be manifestation enough for any one who does not persist in refusing to recognize them."

"In view of all the facts, Mr. Sevenoakes," Edward said steadily, though it cost him an effort and some regrets, "I think we had better dissolve our business relations. I certainly will not consent to take any other position with regard to the management of the men. You perhaps can readily find some one who will. I venture to prophesy that you will get along without further trouble for a week or so." Edward could not resist a touch of satire in that bitter moment; but his generous spirit rose magnanimously above it in his next words. "When my successor is appointed, I freely offer all my experience to assist him in conducting business on the old system, so that there need be no trouble in managing the *work*. The machinery is only obstinate with certain ores, and a certain speed in running. In a short time one can learn to manage it reasonably well. If I can be of any use in this way, you may depend on me."

Mr. Sevenoakes felt better. He did not believe Edward's generosity genuine, but he was glad to see at least a show of docility, glad to feel that Edward had made an attempt to appease him. He did not like to do a mean act any better than most men who think themselves honorable and fair; and yet, though he believed that Edward did not want to leave the mill, — that this was only a ruse employed to win lost favor, — he resolved to take advantage of it, and also to hold Edward to his offer of rendering assistance, if it were needed. Then perhaps he could continue to get along with his new manager. "You have saved me the un-

pleasant necessity of deciding against you, by your resignation," said the wily superintendent. "I accept it, knowing that otherwise we can never accomplish a pacification among the turbulent spirits about us."

"Very well, sir; I am satisfied with that. If you will not wait for the subjection that is certain to come with time, it is the only thing to be done. I know the men quite as well as you do, and I feel confident of the course they will take if unmolested"; and Edward turned away.

"Hold on," called Mr. Sevenoakes; "one moment more. I must make use of your generous offer of help this very evening. I will ask you to see to the watchman, and remain in charge of everything as usual till to-morrow morning. Then we will start up. I think I will let Brooklyn try his hand at managing, and perhaps with your help he will succeed in getting on somehow. May be by to-morrow there will be such developments in the case as will enable us to go on as usual, with you in your old place. Good night, Mr. Dennett."

The superintendent added the last sentence as an inducement for Edward to do his duty as well as usual, fearing he might be negligent unless he had some interest to serve. But he did not mean it; the little shuttle had run its length. His mind was made up; and so he immediately started off to look for George, with his pocket full of cigars and his head full of good news. He felt relieved and almost encouraged, for he had been a victim of the conspiracy rather than an accomplice; and now he hoped for peace and the whistle, and wanted to talk with his confidant over

their gleaming, fragrant Havanas. His search was fruitless, and fruitless also several other times that evening, when he strolled around on the same errand.

About half-past eight the young man appeared, but declined the invitation to take a smoke. "The ladies have captured me," he explained, hastening away; "I am breathlessly obeying their mandates now"; and that was the last the superintendent saw of him.

Edward left the office with a heavy heart. Everything seemed to work against him, even his strivings to be magnanimous to those who had injured him. For by his beneficent offer he was now bound to perform a duty that would be utterly distasteful, assisting, as it did, one who gloried in his downfall. But he put the thought aside as unworthy. He was human, and he felt the sting deeply, but he resolved it should have no place among his troubles. He would not brood over it.

Night came, gloomy with clouds overhead, and sighing winds that rustled through the dry wild oats, and in the treetops moaned and wailed with dismal voices. Lights, pale and spectral, from the hidden moon, broke through the rifts of enveloping blackness, throwing a dim refulgence over the serried groves until they stretched away into fathomless darkness, and falling in a white mystic glare over the rude town, brightened here and there by a redder, warmer light that shone out from some solitary cabin window, or from the wide-doored saloons, murmuring faintly with the din that rang hilariously within. All around reigned a vague unrest, —a weird and mournful prophecy of coming change. The creek, flowing past the mill, no longer brimming

with summer's melted summits, rushed cold and white along its rocky way, and roared in a monotonous undertone of wrath, echoing dull and heavy down the lonesome cañons, with the awful warning voice of eternity whispering through its low, deep thunderings.

The bell for dinner at the big hotel called in the loiterers from the veranda, and lights shone, dim and small, deep in behind the windows, leaving the great building far more gloomy and forbidding than it had ever seemed before. Edward went late into the dining-room, after it was almost deserted, dreading to encounter the curious gaze of the guests in case the news of the change at the mill had been noised abroad, as most certainly it would be when George learned of his promotion, and quite likely, Edward thought, with not much adherence to the truth. His face, he knew, looked shadowy and worn with anxiety, and that night he could not bear the thought of facing the staring multitude with such a testimonial against him and his strong, manly pride. A party of hunters, coming in from their woodland chase, sat at the table with him, talking vociferously in a foreign tongue about their game, and paying little heed to the stranger who shared their meal. The circumstance heightened Edward's loneliness, it seemed so unfriendly to him, while the lights shone dim and unnatural above them, making dark, uncertain shadows in the corners, and unsteady gleams on the dazzling table-cloth. All things about him assumed an unaccountable dreariness, so he pushed his plate aside and went out again into the windy night.

The watchman at the mill sat glumly on the stump that the sleek little Sevenoakes once had graced, lo

ing meditatively up at the hotel, anxious for some signs of life or a breath of the day's subdued excitement. He removed his stale-smelling pipe as if under protest when first spoken to, but when Edward generously offered to relieve him of his watch the last quarter of the night, the pipe went deprecatingly behind him, and a hearty "much obliged," attested his gratitude. "Kinder windy and oncomfortable out to-night," he remarked, with an effort to be somewhat friendly toward this man about whom the whole town was hissing angrily.

"Yes; not a pleasant night to watch. But keep a good lookout, and I'll certainly be around toward morning." The watchman smiled, and jumping down from his stump, started away on a new tour of inspection, the beloved pipe again finding its place between his large yellow teeth.

Out on the edge of the pine woods near the mill stood a little vine-mantled cabin, long deserted and uncared for, and slowly going to decay. It was low and humble, with a leaky roof, and a crumbling chimney built of rocks and mud, but it was covered with a faithful honeysuckle that ran unchecked over gray walls and rent roof, as if the tender vine would hide all these unsightly defects with its dumb but constant love. In the strong light of day the cab was almost attractive, burdened with its wealth of dusky gree nd dry, fallen pine-needles, lod like a s javelins, in the soft moss on time's vernal beauties were a ing gorgeously over the gr abandoned dwelling, with it-

fragrant blossoms, still made a bower even more inviting than the wild nests of vines around it. But at night when the coming winter's melancholy winds had stripped the woods of their bloom and their richest foliage, when ghostly clouds drifted overhead in sable masses, edged with pale, unearthly brightness, when the blackest depths of shadow lurked in that low open doorway, it was anything but alluring and cheerful. Still Edward bent his steps to the lonely cabin, thinking gloomily of its former occupant, a poor old man who worked in the mines. One morning no blue smoke-wreath curled upward from that low, rude chimney, and no bent form was seen creeping slowly along the trail to the mill. They found him pale and cold in the long slumber that knows no dreams; and so when they had carried him through that vine-trellised portal, and had laid him to rest under the lyric pines, with a spray of his beloved honeysuckle on his breast, his little home had fallen into wreck and ruin, and no watchful care now kept its lights burning warmly through the dusky nights, adding their brightness to the hundred stars that twinkled cheerfully from hillside and cañon.

Throwing himself wearily on the stone steps at the door, Edward half reclining watched the white glow force for itself new rifts in the heavy clouds, and listened to the dirge-like voices of the wind. No ghost that haunted this desolate spot could bring terrors to him now. He was battling with his own ghosts,—the spirits of his buried hopes. They rose up and stalked about him in long, jeering files, and would not be silenced. Disappointed in the first warm love of his

honest heart, defeated in all his manly ambition, disgraced and scorned, with none to offer sympathy in his trouble, weakened by his wounded hand, and worn with a restless anxiety,—what wonder, then, that his fate seemed relentlessly cruel, that his hopes were swiftly perishing?

A glance into the dark woodland near him revealed the awful loneliness of its dimly lighted aisles, where the winds played free, and the indistinct shadows shifted and trembled and wove themselves into mighty nets, intangible and indestructible as the meshes of fate; so almost shuddering he turned his eyes toward the hotel on the slope above him just in time to catch a glimpse of a slim girlish figure passing through the long windows to the balcony. The light behind her revealed soft, curving outlines and graceful motions, as, shading her eyes with her hand, she looked earnestly out into the night. But she quickly vanished again, and a dull rattle of the window sounded to the watcher in the far-off, night-hidden background, like the last tinkle of the bells in fairy-land, when the walls of earth shut round, and its glorious visions are hidden from the view of bewildered mortals. Something familiar in the outlines and the movements of that form roused afresh his rebellious feelings, and turned his thoughts to bitter, hopeless memories. He sat motionless, thinking thus for a few moments, when the flutter of a white shawl attracted his notice, and he saw a figure moving swiftly down the broad road toward the mill. A moment's pause where the watchman stood like a black lifeless pillar in the shadow, his invisible pipe glowing faintly like a mammoth fire-fly after each vigorous pull through

its curving stem, and then the strange form moved away, the white shawl gleaming silvery through the young firs, and growing brighter as it neared the little cabin.

A strange sensation thrilled in Edward's heart as the girl came rapidly forward, a light step rustling softly as the wind in the fallen leaves, and he sat up, wondering, with an inexpressible joy, why she came to him. Yes, it surely was Mabel, her quiet grace, her queenly elegance, revealed even in the dim glare that broke through the drifting clouds.

But at last she paused, timidly taking a step backward, and looking eagerly into the shadows that stretched beyond. Edward rose quickly and went toward her.

"Oh!" said the sweet, low voice, half frightened. "Then you *are* here"; and Mabel came forward again, holding out her hand. But it trembled even in the warm, strong grasp that received it, while she said, "I hardly thought you would be in this gloomy place, and yet I had the courage to come and see. The watchman said you were here, but he did not offer to call you, as I thought he would, so I came alone. I wish to tell you something"; and her voice fell as if her courage, too, was growing faint, but after a short pause she continued, sweetly and calmly as at first.

"We have not seen you for a day or so, and I was afraid we would not meet again, for this evening Aunt Cynthia decided to return home to-morrow morning early,—frightened by the signs of storm, I think. But I could not go without thanking you for the kindness you have shown us; I could not bear to let you think

it all forgotten, since it has made our summer here so very happy."

There was a revolution of thought in Edward's brain, and his heart was beating strong and joyous once more. Her words! — they were nothing that an artful coquette might not have said for a last thrust at her victim. Ah! it was useless to argue that; no girl like Mabel would venture forth on such a night, even to add one trophy to her spoils. That blissful fact remained: she had come to him; she had dared to meet him half-way in the renewal of their friendship.

"And there was something else," she went on hurriedly, as if almost afraid to mention what was in her thoughts. "I wanted to tell you before; I wanted so much to sympathize with you in your trouble. I am so very sorry."

With one great bound the world and all the keen relish for its blessings came back to Edward; there was such a materialization of his ghosts as would have delighted beyond expression a spiritualistic circle; he was strong again, he could battle with misfortune, he could almost bear defeat, though it would deprive him of his dearest blessing, if only in that downfall he could feel that Mabel's warm, tender heart was sorry for him.

"Oh, Mabel! forgive me for misjudging you," he said; "I thought you cold and thoughtless. Why did we let a trifle estrange us? Mabel, you surely knew my feelings that night when Miss Minton's words, which we could not but overhear, brought such a terrible wound to my heart. Why did you not assure me that they were untrue?"

"Could I explain my feelings to you then? You had

every reason to believe in my friendship, — at least, small reason to think it insincere," said Mabel.

"I realized afterward that I should not have heeded what we heard, — that I should have asked you if it were true," he answered hastily; "and yet, I thought such questions would avail nothing; they would but prolong my disappointment, if you really were not earnest in your friendship. I should have waited till I had the courage to ask you. Forgive me, Mabel; let me still be your friend."

He walked back with her up the slope to the hotel, renewing with a stronger faith their broken trust, while the dim, ghostly lights that fell around them changed to a soft, white radiance, and the sobbing winds to cool, inspiring breezes, that blew into blossoms wide and fresh and fragrant the opening buds of hope. Three words he whispered to her as they parted, adding softly, as he pressed her hand, "It is now my dearest aim that I may some time say the rest."

He went back to the little cabin on the edge of the wood, but all its loneliness was gone. Somehow, in the vague, indistinct language of thought, he made a resolve that it should ever after be most sacred and dear to him. He would never tell the sweetness of the secret that clustered around it, and it would always be a sign to him, an incentive in weary days perhaps, reminding him that life had yielded there one vision of its blissful paradise, the influence and the memory of which could never be effaced. Half reclining on the stone doorstep, he covered his face with both his hands, as if the better to look into the future, and listened to the winds that struck a stormy music from the lyres

strung in the tossing pine-tops, and breathed the pure, cool air that came like a draught from the fabled life-renewing fountains beneath the hills' hearts of eternal snow.

Long he sat there, while the white rifts of light in the sky above him shifted and changed and faded, and the honeysuckle vine that grew beside the porch dropped down upon his head a leafy spray, like a gentle caress; thoughts assumed the shape of plans, and wishes and hopes came fast with them, so that the hours flew by, and he heeded them not.

Still in Edward's mind burned the rapturous hope that made him strong for the future. He had a great work before him,—a work with an end in view that would make each stroke a pleasure, each hour a fleeting moment, bringing nearer his one great, life-long happiness.

The late stage came and brought its short excitement; the hostler led away his horses and closed the stables; one by one the lights vanished from the cabin windows on the hillsides; the hotel at last was dark and quiet, and gloom and midnight settled over the slumbering camp among the hills.

Finally the dreamer's head fell back against the soft, fluttering mass of leaves, and drowsiness gave way to restful sleep. And in that slumber came a vision strange and blissful. He dreamed of twilight woods, wild, boundless, and shadowy; of wandering alone through this deep, strange wilderness, and vainly seeking some outlet from its depthless mystery. Then the echoes of a sweet song in the air above the mighty treetops floated down to him, and a faint rustle in the

interweaving boughs that shut out the darkening sky already thick with stars. He looked upward and saw a heavenly being descending slowly to the ground. It had no wings, no form nor guise of an angel; and yet it came miraculously through the air into this far-off, dreamy forest, and to him. On the ground beside him the lovely being alighted, a soft little hand stole into his, and looking up he saw Mabel, robed in dainty white, standing timidly beside him. Then all the trees around burst forth into ecstacies of song, weird and strangely sweet, that made the long aisles ring and echo, and sent melodious vibrations even up into the depths of starlit sky above.

Suddenly, in a great flood, light, richly golden, terribly bright, burst over the darkened scene; it illuminated with a supernatural brilliancy the far, dim vistas where lurked the hidden beasts, threw a strange glow into the heavens above, and put out the silvery light of all the throbbing stars.

He started up from his dream and rubbed his eyes. Was his mind unbalanced, that he could not realize the scene before him? or had the little cabin been spirited away into some unearthly place where fierce destruction was abroad? For lo! far through the surrounding trees burned the smoky red flames that swept down the high, dry grasses, and fed angrily on the free, fresh winds; up at the big hotel long, smoky tongues of light curled round the roof, — the woods, the world, the sky, were all afire!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DOCTOR'S SUMMER DREAMS.

Hope and fear alternate chase
Our course through life's uncertain race.
SCOTT.

"DOWN cellar" is ofttimes a dreadful term to the little ones whose first impressions of that cool, dark place arise from hasty visits deep underground, where a huge cistern of water stands with the light playing in golden flecks and dancing rings upon its restless surface, and reflecting itself far off from brown, damp walls in rainbow-tinted circlets that twinkle and quiver, and flash out again, with all the strange uncertainty of elf-land. But there are suggestions of material things as well, coming from the scent of rich preserves, and rolls of sweet, fresh butter packed down cool in an ice-lined chest, and fragrant, rosy apples, proving that even enchanted regions abound in tempting eatables. Nevertheless, they have lost more than half their charm until brought out of that chill-aired place to the strong, sweet light of reassuring day.

But the little folk could never have such a fear of the terrible cellar as Mrs. Mills had on that day when the Doctor sat dreaming in the kitchen, and was aroused by the startling shriek. It probably took Lois less than half a minute to find out the cause of this crying distress, yet to Mrs. Mills, lying helpless and racked with

agony on the cold floor of the cellar, it seemed like the long lapse of a never-ending span of time. She was dying, she thought, down there all alone, her screams had not been heard, and now she had no longer power to cry out, while a cold, suffocating feeling, like the first wave of the dark river, came creeping over her.

Dr. Knapp of course was behind Lois in finding out the dire disaster, but he came along rather briskly nevertheless, and rendered valuable assistance by carrying the suffering Mrs. Mills up into the daylight and to her own chamber.

Lois ran for smelling-salts and cold water, though the Doctor calmly bade her not to use them, but to get bandages and splints instead, and with a strength of nerve seemingly impossible to one so conscious of himself at times, he carefully examined Mrs. Mills's arm, broken above the elbow. In a very few minutes the bone had been firmly set by the Doctor's steady and skilful hand, and the worst of her pain was over.

"Oh, Lois, dear!" were the first words she said; "don't leave me, will you?

"I am here," Lois answered. "Keep very still for a while, and I will tell you then what has happened."

"Oh! bring John in and little Jimmie; why are they not here?"

"They have been sent for, and will come in a few minutes."

She lay moaning for a time, and then asked, as if she really suffered little pain, and could think of making arrangements for the future, "Lois, my dear girl, you will not go away and leave me? I could n't trust my house with any one but you, and school will close

this week, you know; so if you give up your visit home you could stay as well as not."

"Don't worry," said Lois, hoping to avoid a promise. "Everything will be arranged to please you."

Mrs. Mills closed her eyes and moaned feebly. "Lois," she said again after a time, "did you say you would stay and take care of me?"

"Of course," Lois answered; "I am right here taking care of you now. But do not think about it. Here are Mr. Mills and Jimmie to see you," she added, as they entered the room.

The Doctor prepared to withdraw, cautioning them to keep the sufferer very quiet, and talk but little, and in a moment Lois joined him where he sat waiting in the parlor.

"I do not know what to do, Doctor," she said. "I almost feel as though I ought to stay and take care of Mrs. Mills, now that this unfortunate accident has happened; and yet it will be a great disappointment to give up my trip home. What is your advice?"

If the Doctor had consulted his selfish feelings, he would have answered promptly, "Stay"; but he put them aside and considered the case in other aspects; he thought of Lois's pleasant ways, how helpful she could be to Mrs. Mills in her trouble; he thought of the many pinched, suffering faces in the old hospital that looked eagerly for her coming, and the verdict still was "Stay," though he did not have to question his own lonely heart, that would lose its best sunshine if she were gone.

He sat thoughtful and grave for a moment, but when his conscience wholly approved of his decision, he

looked up with a glad light in his kindly gray eyes as he answered, "I think, on the whole, Miss Warren, it would be much better for every one — except perhaps yourself — for you to stay. I can see very readily that Mrs. Mills depends greatly on you, and could hardly trust another. It is better to cheer those in suffering than they who are strong and well, is it not?"

So after that Lois decided to stay, and when Mrs. Mills asked her again to remain, as if the thought troubled her and she must be assured, Lois was ready to answer promptly that she would.

But the Doctor was more pleased than any one. It was a relief to him, aside from the other pleasure he derived, to know that bright and careful Lois would be there to follow his directions with religious faithfulness, instead of some presuming elderly nurse; and again, with what pleasure he looked forward to seeing Lois every day, to consulting her ideas, and drawing inspiration from her cheerful spirit, only the Doctor's sensitive, lonely heart could attest.

So the days wore on into summer, rich and golden, which brought with it the red June roses, the lilies of dark purple, and the full-blown sprays of heavy-headed golden-rod; the wild roses in the thorny brambles by the water margins lost their single-petalled blossoms and held up seed-lobes of flaming scarlet, and all nature took on richer, deeper hues. Over field and meadow the harvesters gathered in their mounds of sweet wild hay, and broad fields of billowy wheat ripened from seas of silvery green into long stretches richly laden with pale gold.

To the Doctor, who still drove about in his high-

wheeled cart, the days passed by with shadowings of a distant glory on his dull, beclouded sky. And dreams came to him,—dreams that were fairer and more golden than he had ever known before; dreams that purchased back for him the inspiration of his youth, that only added more and more a calmer, deeper beauty to his unselfish life. These thoughts came not to him with a vague unrest, an unsatisfied longing as to the impetuous fervor of youth; but day after day, as he drove over the dusty roads, and saw the cool mantle of spring perish into coverlets woven of the matted wild oats and the broken stubble, as the trees lost their frail young leaves and took on foliage broad and dark and dusty, when no more the locusts hung down mellow, sunlit clusters of fragrance into his path, still life retained its rosy hue, and he missed not the departed spring-time, while he kept the merry rhyme of May-day singing in his soul. Wherever he went, he carried the peace that reigned over him, while from his dreaming eyes the landscapes borrowed touches of beauty that they had never worn before.

Lady Snowdrop was not averse to have the Doctor fall a-dreaming while out on his hot dusty journeys from place to place; she no doubt heartily approved of the habit, and felt that he showed most excellent taste in thus enjoying himself. And there were times, when a cool shade tree offered rest and refreshing shelter from the noon-day sun, that the Doctor put in no objection whatever when she presumptuously drew up to a dead halt, and fairly went to sleep under the drowsy branches; but he just sat and watched the little gray birds that hopped about with calm, clear trills of song,

and felt a kind of kinship in their subdued, sweet ecstacies.

Lois learned to like the Doctor better every day. She depended so much upon him, and enjoyed so heartily their association, that she came unconsciously to look for his coming with a thrill of pleasure, and even to put on a snowier apron and place a fresh rosebud in her bright wavy hair when the hour drew near for his arrival. There was nothing strange in this. She respected the Doctor more than any man she knew, she enjoyed his society more, so no wonder she unconsciously learned to compare her thoughts with his; to ask his advice, and admire his broad, deep, manly character.

Lois's visits to the hospital ceased altogether after Mrs. Mills's accident, and she missed them more than ever now that she was deprived of her daily walks to school. But one day when the Doctor unexpectedly called as she was dusting and hurrying about with her work, he noticed that her face had lost much of that fresh fair bloom it used to have, and her blue eyes wanted some of their old sparkle and life; so he said, in the modest, retiring way he had of making suggestions, "Miss Warren, don't you think one of our old drives out to Tenayee would do you some good just now? It don't do to stay at home too long, even to take care of sick folks."

The idea struck her pleasantly, and a radiant smile lighted her face as she answered, "I have been wishing for the time to come when I could go again."

She selected the following Monday as the most convenient day to go, and arranged to have Mrs. Platt care for Mrs. Mills during her absence.

The two ladies had a whole day to themselves, which quite delighted Mrs. Mills, who, of course, took the lead in all discussions. But her confinement in-doors had deprived her of any outside talk; and besides, there were some things about Lois she thought quite necessary to relate. So she opened the conversation about the school-mistress the first thing. Most likely if she had had all the summer to discuss the affair in, told all she had seen, and believed herself all she suggested, it would have reached enormous proportions now. However, this was the first opportunity she had been blessed with since the day of her misfortune, for Lois had been a constant attendant ever since, and she had to take up the subject exactly where she left off.

"I suppose," she began, turning her face so that the cool air from Mrs. Platt's fanning would strike her better, — "I suppose the people round town miss seeing Lois and her medical friend these days. But *I* don't, I can assure you. I see quite enough even when I am fastened down here, hardly able to move, to convince me that it 's just as I told you once before. They must be engaged, or something pretty near it, *she* is so attentive. Why, actually every call he makes, — and they were pretty frequent at first, — she escorts him to the door, and they have charming, confidential little chats out there in the vines, but I never overhear anything that is said, they talk so low. That is a suspicious circumstance, — don't you think so?"

"Perhaps they are talking over what is best to do for you, and do not wish to let you hear," suggested Mrs. Platt.

"O yes, possibly. But their talks are too lengthy

for that. They would have to tell all the history of my life over twice in order to talk so long. I think they are planning, — I'm sure I do. It will be too bad if we have to get another teacher for the school, though. The children are used to Lois, and like her, — all of them. Besides, they learn remarkably fast. I really believe other people were beginning to suspect something, for Mrs. Dean, who was in here the other day when the Doctor called, noticed that he and Lois had a great deal of business out in the parlor, and a remark was made — I think she suggested it — about Lois being plenty old enough to think of getting married. She said that young man Lois used to think so much of ought to be forgotten by this time. He was not worthy, anyway, of such remembrance, in my mind; and those rumors that were floating around about him after he left I more than half believe, though I wish not to disturb the repose nor revive the forgotten transgressions of the dead."

Mrs. Platt was of the opinion that Lois was not nursing any unhappy regrets for the past. "She is so cheerful, you know, Mrs. Mills, that there is scarcely any possibility of that, although I own she seemed very devoted for a while. It is nothing out of the way, I think, that she does not turn her thoughts to such things. The right one probably has not come along yet; and then, Lois's life must be a pleasant one, for she loves her work, and has so many friends, while her cares never fret, but only interest, her"; and Mrs. Platt felt well satisfied after she had said this, slyly thinking that she had done a good turn for Lois, and quite likely Mrs. Hunman would find a chance to

heartily, — in reality because he had called up a faint blush to Lois's cheek, and so thought she had betrayed herself, — while he called out in ranting style, "I told you that you have the right side, and your little pacer, too; but I should advise you to find out all about her whaling propensities before —" Down came the fish-rod whip for the first time upon the unsuspecting Lady Snowdrop, up flew the dust in vigorous clouds, and the rest of the sentence, as well as the jocund speaker, were drowned in an earthy embrace.

"Mr. Graham never tires of referring to the amusement he felt one day when he discovered me punishing a refractory little rebel at school," explained Lois.

"You might have extended the courtesy to him with good effect," responded her companion, who was thoroughly disgusted.

When the sport-loving young man again caught up to his friends, he thought it wiser to dispense with fun for the time, and fearing he might have offended the Doctor by an impolite reference to his horse, — he never once suspected Lois had cause for offence, because the girls liked everything *he* did, anyway, — devoted himself to being as agreeable as he could to that forgiving personage as long as he could endure the slow travelling; and when he thought he had mended matters, said to the Doctor that likely they would meet at Mrs. Humman's, since he had met Byron at a horse-race, where they had planned to "swap nags," and then galloped on out of sight.

After that the Doctor drove on slowly as before, feeling that some fulfilment of his golden visions was complete with good little Lois there beside him, warm-

ing up his kindly old heart to a perfect Elysium of happiness.

Remembering the fact afterward, he felt very thankful for the slight delay, for by prolonging that happy hour with her, he postponed for a little time a coming sorrow.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE FINAL RECKONING.

She stood as stands the stricken deer,
Caught midway in the fearful chase.
WHITTIER.

WHEN Nita had reached the cabin she called home, twilight had long since deepened into night, — a night dark and chill with south winds, which winged across the frozen summits and grew cold as those aged mountain brows, bare and ghostly and faintly outlined like spectres in the starlight. The winds came tearing down the heights, tossing among the pine-tops, and roaring through the gorges. Before it the moist atmosphere of the Indian summer-tide turned inky black and thick with storm-clouds that banked up against the hills and left only glimpses of the serene heavens, alight with still, pale stars and a slender, silvery moon that seemed to shrink from the darkness beneath.

Had Nita been the spirit of this wild gathering storm, she could not have seemed more a part of it. Her dark, startled eyes looking wildly out from their jetty brows and lashes, her blanched cheek, and the dashing fierceness of her motions were all in harmony with the stormy commotion around her.

She sprang upon the porch with a bound, and burst into the dingy living-room which was but half lighted by the glow of a small lamp. Her father and mother had finished their supper, and were waiting rather un-

easily for the truant. As Nita began to eat the bowlful of bread and milk which had been left for her on the bare pine table, her father turned toward her, grumbling, with his pipe in his mouth, and still cutting and crumbling the tobacco which he had been preparing to fill it.

"Arrah there, Nita, you mind that you are not to stay so late. It 's a sorry way for the likes of you now, it is, do ye hear?"

"The bell-cow got beyond the creek, and I could n't find her anyhow," she replied, timidly.

"The bell-cow, is it now? I milked her meself before dark."

Nita shrank from his stern gaze, and laid down her spoon; then the tender heart of the father regained its usual sway. "Mind what I tells ye, girl," he added, in a gentler tone, "and come now and loight me pipe. It 's been a harud day fur yer old dad, an' he needs a comfort now."

In truth, the idlers up at the mine had vexed his soul not a little. He could not find it in his heart to side with them against one whom he knew to be stanch and true to the highest principles of manhood, although he might not fully comprehend such a character. He had worked with Edward Dennett's father in the old mine years ago, when Edward was a school-boy, and he had known the lad from his youth.

A man who possessed the cultivation and bearing of a gentlemen, and added to these the principles of justice and truth, constituted his ideal of what a gentleman should be. And Edward Dennett filled this as well as his father had before him.

"Begorra, boys," he had said to the strikers, "a jintleman whin he 's a-bossing of a job don't want folks a-smokin' and cussin' around now. Ye all know that, an' it 's divil a bit o' luck 'll come out o' this, I can tell ye."

When Nita had reached home so late, her disobedience had seemed a spice of insubordination and obstinacy like that of the strikers which had tried him all day, and so the voice that usually fell only in words of tenderness and praise upon Nita's ear now smote it with blame, which, though merited, rankled and stung in a heart already seething and heaving with angry passion, like the fires beneath a volcanic crater.

With the same set features and flashing, downcast eyes, she filled the pipe, drawing it while she held the flickering match to the weed it contained, and blowing the wreaths of smoke from her mobile, cherry-colored lips in a manner that showed this to be a familiar duty. But surely her small, even teeth, as white as purest pearls, bore witness that she had not yet followed her parent's example in the use of tobacco. The old man pulled off his boots meanwhile, and sat toasting his feet by the fire, and on receiving his pipe, smiled and chucked Nita pleasantly under the chin, and then relapsed into his dozing. As usual, her mother, a corpulent old Spanish woman, whose abundant hair of raven blackness, and still fine eyes, were all that remained of her former charms, reclined upon an old sofa covered with once brilliant but now soiled and faded chintz. She was indolent and luxurious like her Spanish ancestors, whom she so closely resembled in feature and disposition; and no fair señora, under

the lemon boughs of Seville, could have rolled her cigarette more coquettishly than did this drowsy old dame, merely from habit implanted by nature.

Poor Nita was thus left alone to struggle with the furies which had taken possession of her breast. Mechanically she washed the bowl that had contained her light supper, and poured fresh water into the basin for the watch-dogs. Then she walked restlessly about the rooms until her father went to bed, and her mother scowled upon her for the noise; so she slipped quietly out again into the darkness of the gloomy night, where the blasts beat against the house, and seemed to roll over the pine-tops, making them bow and shriek with far-off, unearthly voices that filled the gorges with their groans.

Her heart was aching, notwithstanding the scorn and humiliation that maddened her.

"False, false and cruel!" she moaned, ravelling out unconsciously her long, smooth braids, and hurrying through the woods fearlessly, half-blinded by her anguish. Back and forth she paced, her white face gleaming from the darkness that enfolded her, sometimes bursting into sobs and wringing her hands with all the fierceness of the hot Spanish blood that made her a veritable harp of feeling, the music of which is pleasure or pain, and this was pain,—the pain of unrequited love, of remorse and self-humiliation, and of despair.

Those sad, tender eyes, and forgiving, outstretched arms of her husband, had been more cruel than harsh upbraiding. "My poor, little, strayed lamb, I should not have left you," he had said, in a voice tender as a

mother's, while she leaned against a tall pine trunk like some brilliant, bending lily that had found support by its rough sides. Her hands had been clasped behind her, as if to make sure that he should not take them. Her proud little head had been bent with shame, and her cheek as crimson as if the last fading rose of twilight emanated from its rounded velvet surface. Her words of self-reproach and her backwardness he could not understand. To him these had been only manifestations of native coyness. And had he not been gone a long while? A child soon forgets; true, she was more than a child, but to him she seemed only little more, and this shyness merely implied a renewal of their courtship. With a smile on his lips he had approached as gently as if she had been a young bird.

"I will take better care of you now, my little Nita; so just one kiss to show that you have not quite forgotten —" But she had shrunk back, confounded and self-condemned by her own utter falseness. She knew that he thought her still the hopeful, joyous child-wife whom he had left.

In the fading twilight he had not seen that she was changed. Her regard for him had been but a child's gratitude, because he had pleased her with the promise of coveted toys. Now a grand passion had come to her life, making her a woman, — one that was full of the fire and fierceness of a tropic clime; and at this moment the deep, all-sweeping tide of this master passion had been lashed to a storm of fury, dashing back from sunken rocks upon her poor, untried, and unschooled soul, that was frenzied with the shock.

With a scream of terror she had fled, and disappeared through the forests. No thought of the treasures he had promised, no memory of their vows, could bring calmness or relief.

While wandering up and down, she recalled her husband's goodness and faithfulness to herself, until she sank down and leaned her cheek upon the dust, for shame that she did not merit, and could not reward, this noble devotion. Then came the thought of that other. She lived over again every scene connected with him, and recalling their first meeting, she writhed with the memory of the insult he had offered. Oh, how plainly could she see his perfidy and her own blindness!

Revenge! This thought fired her brain with a new purpose. She knew how easily she could spill the life-blood of the wretch who had so ruthlessly broken her heart for idle pastime; and yet with a second's reflection, her unperverted intuition taught her what an unsatisfying thing this revenge would prove.

She, with her weak hand, might strike out his life; but when he was gone, the same fierce agony which he had caused must forever wring her heart with pain, recoiling upon herself, since there would be no object against which she could direct it. So she sank down again.

The reckoning hour with conscience had come, which all must know who leave the path of uprightness for that of evil. If she could survive this struggle, she must either repent, or become hardened and lost in the ways of sin. Who, born and bred in these temples of nature, pillared with living shafts which God had

raised, and walled in with the eternal mountains, could forsake his whole former life, and deliberately pursue still, amid such surroundings, the treacherous *ignis fatuus* in the swamps of sin? Surely she could not. But victory left her a hopeless wreck, condemned by her own soul, so hopeless and broken that she would not arise from the earth, upon which she lay prone, until she had unsheathed her little secret dagger and vowed to end her life. With a dash of the tragic, which always belongs to a nature like hers, she bared her breast, and pressed the keen edge of the dagger to her burning, throbbing bosom. The chill of the steel awakened a thought, and with the impulse she sprang up. "He is good. I will go to him and beg his forgiveness, and then die and go to my God," she resolved, and bounded away through the black forest like a young panther.

The wind blew sharp and chill around her, but she was unconscious of the cold; the brambles and bushes caught her long, dishevelled hair, but she tore it away from their gnarled, crackling fingers, heedless of the pain. She knew well where she could find her husband, and the darkness hid not her path. It was down beyond the bushy swale, across the gorge, up the slope past the town, and then down the steep road that wound into the cañon. She knew the room he would occupy in her brother-in-law's house. A tap on the window would bring him out, and she would tell him all, and kneel before him for the forgiveness which she knew she would receive from a husband so loving and faithful, and — then the dagger. She clutched it tighter, to make sure of its safety. Ah! well she knew its keen

edge and glittering beauty! It was her mother's, and she had often thought it looked like a willow leaf, long and slender, transformed to purest, brightest silver. And it should stay in her wicked heart and rust there till the judgment-day. She imagined this would be a sort of penance for her sin. As she was hastening along the slope, just north of the town, suddenly she stopped, and a strange, new terror took possession of her, freezing the blood in her veins, stiffening those swift, supple limbs, and making her wild midnight eyes stony with amazement.

She stood petrified, as if she could never move from the spot, while her burning brain comprehended every detail of the sight upon which her gaze was riveted.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE FADING DREAM.

As fades the luminous carmine of the dawn
To eyes that gaze on life's turmoil and strife,
So fades the dream of love, bright, heaven-born,
Dragged to the level of a common life.

*Selected.*

AFTER their visit to the hospital was over, Lois and the Doctor drove up to Mrs. Hunman's, but there was no answer to their repeated rings. "Everybody seems to be out," said the Doctor, looking at his watch. "And yet this is one of the days when I am expected, and we are not too early, either. O, I have guessed it now. Perhaps Mrs. Hunman is at the back of the house superintending her weekly washing, for this is Monday, and Mr. Hunman, who generally attends to it, complained of a toothache on my last visit, and quite likely is not able to do it to-day."

He had scarcely finished speaking when Horace Graham, Jr., came up the walk, a mischievous smile breaking over his face as he comprehended the situation. "What's up?" he called. "Have they locked you out? You will have to go without your dinner now, sure; but never mind, since your appetites are not likely to be extra good, anyway. *You*'ll both do, I guess, if you don't get any. But just think of poor me going plumb to starvation. I could eat snails, I 'm so hungry already."

Lois faced him with a look that was very severe to come from eyes so charmingly blue and merry as hers.

"Well, you won't have to starve, until I investigate further," said the good old Doctor, venturing around through the luxuriant garden toward the back of the house. Ah! I have found some one," he said, looking around and beckoning for the others to follow him. "See how accurately I can guess," he added.

"You have already had an example of how expert *I* am at that," said Horace, as they joined the Doctor.

It was wash-day at the Hunman residence, sure enough. The shady back yard had been converted into a laundry, and tubs of snowy clothes, pails of bluing, and pans of starch stood here and there about the terraced steps leading down from the hot, steaming kitchen; while under a leafy tree, in the deepest shadow, Nettie was at work in the milky suds, busily rubbing up and down, unconscious of intruders. She made a sweet little picture there, facing a hedge of flowering pease growing up through a mass of low currant-bushes. It was just the proper setting for such a girl as she, — a place where she could use up her superfluous temper, and seem quite docile and even pretty, with her cool, light dress fastened loosely about her neck, where stray, damp locks curled up bewitchingly in little rings, and her plump, dimpled arms blushing pinkly through the foamy suds. There was a suggestion of robust health in her bright, red cheeks and in the pale, gold freckles that seemed to be showering down from the sunshiny sky through the shadowy branches above her in tiny specks of light, over face and neck and arms alike.

She looked up suddenly from her work and saw the

Doctor coming through the hollyhocks, followed by the others, and her quick, round eyes did not fail to notice that Lois was behind him. She bowed and looked at them with a sour face.

"You must n't come around into people's back yards unless you expect to find them in uncomfortable plight, and take your share of suds," she said, with a decided vim in her tone.

"She is n't going to throw any, is she?" asked Horace, affectedly, of Lois.

"Is your grandma at home?" asked the Doctor.

"Certainly. Am I not out here scrubbing away alone because she had to be in-doors fixing dinner for you? You see our wash-woman could not come to-day, and grandma and I have had to manage with the work ourselves. So we are late," she said, her voice softening a little, and her eyes glancing slyly toward Horace.

"But no one answered our ring at the front door," said Dr. Knapp. "That is why I came around here."

"There! I know why she did n't hear it; of course she 's asleep. Grandpa kept the whole house up last night with his toothache."

"Well, don't disturb her, then," said the Doctor, considerately. "We will sit down here in the garden till she wakes."

"Observe me obeying the governor's decision immediately," said Horace, perching himself upon the end of a box, and throwing pebbles at a hen.

"O yes, I must," said Nettie. "Why, she would scold me if I did n't wake her"; so she told them to go around to the front door and she would be there to

receive them. Horace rose and kicked over the box that had served him, looking back at Nettie as they walked away, and in a tone that was intended to be low, but which sounded gratingly harsh on the stillness, said to the Doctor, "Is n't she a little savage?"

When good-natured Mrs. Hunman received her visitors, she was instantly reminded of Mrs. Platt's instructions, and resolved to perform them faithfully.

Horace, who was a stranger to the family, but who had struck up a wonderful friendship with Byron on a remarkably short acquaintance, remained to dinner, and rather put a restraint on the good old lady's intentions. But after the meal, when the young men went out to "swap nags," she opened the subject in solid earnest.

"Well, Doctor," she began, "I suppose you find these hot days rather uncomfortable, now that you are getting a little old?"

"Yes," said the Doctor, passing his hand through his hair when reminded of its gray threads,—"yes, I do find the heat somewhat unpleasant."

But Mrs. Hunman did not intend to allow him to ignore her reference to his age in that way.

"When a person's not overly young," she said, "they don't stand a very good chance to get along well. They can't put up with the warm weather as comfortably as when they were young, nor get through the world so good in anything; and particularly, they don't have such a good show in matrimony."

Lois blushed, and the Doctor grew nervous, and pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead, but he was fortunate enough to think of a reply.

"You are right, Mrs. Hunman," he said. "Age robs one of his best forces, but it adds experience to make up a little for the deficiency."

"Seems to me, Doctor," she continued, "You ought to be thinking of getting married yourself, before you get so old you can't find anybody to have you. Why don't you think about it?"

The Doctor looked as if he had received a blow. His feelings were so sensitive and delicate that anything presented so bluntly as Mrs. Hunman's volunteered advice seemed to him incomparably coarse and shocking. He grew very red over it, but notwithstanding his usual embarrassment in such positions, he managed to think of something that would tend to put an end to the conversation on this subject. He said, "Your idea may be worthy of consideration, Mrs. Hunman, but that is a matter I do not care to discuss publicly."

"Well, well," said the innocent old lady laughing, "the idea occurred because you and your friend here look so nice together." She was determined not to be put off without saying it in some way.

"It seems to *me*," interposed Lois, pleasantly, but not without tumultuous feelings because of the reference to herself, "that such ideas should not enter your mind unless they also enter the minds of those concerned. They may not always be entirely welcome, Mrs. Hunman." She added that last sentence for the Doctor's sake, knowing that his native gallantry would prevent him from giving such a hint, feeling its necessity, and yet believing that he would wish it said.

Still that last sentence crushed all the romantic hopes the Doctor cherished, it dissolved a thousand

little pictures he had dreamed of, and it quenched the sunshine out of an otherwise dull and rayless future; but he sat without a tremor, and went on gravely with the conversation that followed, in the face of a deadly pain.

It did not add to his comfort that Nettie was on the war-path that day, and went around sulkily watching her chance to do or say something to annoy Lois. But the latter young lady was not in the least discomposed. She talked away as cheerily as ever; insisted on being allowed to try some remedy to relieve Mr. Hunman, inspired the Doctor to suggest heated charcoal held in the mouth, till finally the poor old man, who had been raving around with a handkerchief on his head and the tears streaming down a puffed cheek, declared that his pain was so much eased that he could get a little sleep.

Then Lois began to talk with Mrs. Hunman of the flowers in the old garden, about planting and watering and trimming, and finally mentioned the thorny bush of pink roses that grew beside the walk where she and the Doctor had stopped on their first visit for some flowers, and she had so sweetly offered to mend his torn glove. Many a time since then had he paused reverently by it, to recall its happy associations, or to gather a leaf in remembrance of them. Now it had all changed to bitterness.

He could no longer endure to stay and hear Lois talk so lightly, her eyes glistening with brightness, while his were strangely clouded with something he could not quite explain, and hardly dared to try. So he
refuge in the garden. Alas! this too but
blissful day of spring, when all th

filled with delicious, fresh young leaves, when perfumes floated over them in the drowsy breath of mignonette and roses, and the breezes brought something of that olden spell on their cooling wings, from the far-off mysteries of the hills and the drooping skies, that had cast a tinge of rosy hope over all his life.

But as he sat there among the broad, dark leaves watching the spots of sunbeams light up with quivering splendor the covering of dried and scentless grasses underfoot, and listening to the faint, high hissing of a bee somewhere among the apple-boughs, a great peace swept through his heart, and opened his blinded eyes to a wisdom that brought him comfort and tranquillity. He gave up, not without a lingering and sorrowful regret, all those strange, sweet dreams that had made his future promise the belated blossoms of life's spring; he gave up many a hope that had wrapped such halos of transcendent light and beauty over all the coming scenes of his existence, and he accepted the calm, familiar way again, — a way that seemed to him now very blank and purposeless, very destitute of life's choicest, sweetest riches. Fate had lifted him up and had given him a glimpse, through the rifted clouds of life's dull sky, of the radiant glory of Love's paradise, but she had cast him down so far below the plane of that fair land that he could never hope to walk again upon its hallowed ground. And yet one consolation remained for all his blighted hopes, — poor and meagre though it might have been to others, — the memory that the object of his love was still left to him, with every charm she had held for his heart, preserved in all its former beauty. To a younger man, unschooled

to disappointments and griefs, this might have been only an aggravation to a bruised and wounded heart. But the Doctor had not won his silvery locks for naught. The fresh enthusiasm of his youth had not been blunted, the glowing fires of his early hopes had not been cooled, without having left a power as potent in their stead. He had known sorrow, he had borne defeat, he had seen the best ideals of life perish, and he could bear his grief and take the blessing left to him with a thankful heart, knowing well how many of life's joys change only into gall and bitterness.

And there in the old garden, on the grave of his buried happiness, in the face of a future darkened into midnight, he made a resolve to guard through all the vicissitudes of her way the gentle girl who had taught his heart to feel such love.

But the world's irreverence broke on his melancholy hour, loth to grant him even the respite of solitude, for Nettie, catching a glimpse of him sitting under the trees so thoughtfully and idle, called to him to come and see her new pets.

In a dazed way he went to her, and she, perceiving her advantage of having caught him in a reckless mood, ordered him to hold the basket for her while she hung out the clothes, before she rewarded him with a sight of her pet puppies, and he complied as if he knew not what he did. Horace coming from the stables saw him, and rushed in to get Lois to view the "great sights" out in the back garden. Little knowing what his object was, she went.

"Is n't that a picture of prospective domestic joy?" he asked, pointing through the hollyhocks.

"O yes, like enough, if he don't have to go back a dozen times after he gets started, to trade dogs."

Laugh as she might at this absurd picture, it nevertheless made an impression on her mind. She thought it scarcely becoming in the Doctor to humor and baby such a saucy and disagreeable girl as Nettie seemed to be, at the expense of his own dignity. He not only took no offence at her impudence, but he excused it to such an extent that he was willing to sacrifice some of his good sense to gratify her whims. It was something she could not understand, something that she could not respect in him, and hence she could not forgive him.

To the Doctor, Nettie was a high-tempered, spoiled girl, whose natural infirmities were grievously aggravated by her circumstances. People liked too well the fun of seeing her anger kindled to desist for her sake; and so the Doctor's patience and consideration with her had won for him the truest friendship she was capable of giving, and showed him many innocent hopes that she cherished, many affectionate little touches to her character, that quite redeemed her from the unloveliness that seemed all-pervading to others.

But Lois was still further surprised that day by something that put a disquietude into her cheerful heart, and raised a doubt in her conscientious mind whether her duty really lay in the path she was following,—whether it would not be productive in the end of evil instead of good to her fellow-beings. It happened in this wise: the Doctor, who had another visit to make at the hospital, went away before Lois, and she told him that she preferred to walk from Mrs. Hunman's, and then he would not be delayed by the extra time it would take to drive back for her.

After she had left the house she discovered that she had forgotten her parasol, and went back to get it. She entered the garden at the side gate where the Doctor usually hitched his horse, and passed along the well-beaten path that led through an arbor to the house. When she reached the arbor she became aware of a commotion between Nettie and her Uncle Byron on the back steps. Loud sounds issued from Nettie, tearful, angry exclamations, and protestations against his ill treatment of her weakness.

"I don't care!" Lois heard, the voice weakened by tears and broken by sobs; "you 'd feel bad too if you had to stand it as I do. I just hate her! I hate her! She 's a mean —"

"She 's a mean thing, — there!" came a high voice in imitation of the first.

"She 's just got the Doctor so he don't like his little girl any more. She rides around in his cart all she wants to, and he never lets me have it now, — boo! hoo! — to take Minnie Crane out riding, — boo! hoo! She 's done it all, I know. I can see he likes her the best, and I can't have any more rides, — boo! hoo! You get away! I hate you too! I don't like anybody in the world but grandpa and Dr. Knapp."

Lois fled, forgetful of parasol and everything else in her desire to get out of hearing of that voice. She was so surprised and troubled that she accused herself of injustice to this poor little wayward girl she had just overheard bewailing her unhappiness; and then came the justification of her own conscience that acquitted her on the ground of ignorance of the true state of things; and lastly, the resolve to be no longer a source of pain to others.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE FIRE.

**Fierce is the tyranny of fire; it springs from a lowly birth-place on the ground, but rises to high heaven, and burns out e'en the fadeless glory of the stars. — *Selected.***

VAGUELY as in a dream Edward Dennett remembered those terrible moments that succeeded his sudden awakening, — how he had madly started up with the loud cry of "Fire! fire!" ringing wildly and long over the sleeping town; how in his hasty flight past the mill he had stumbled over the prostrate form of the unfaithful, slumbering watchman; how dim figures began to appear moving about bewilderingly rapid in the streets below, lighted to a dim twilight by the white glow overhead and the dull red reflection from the blazing forests. Still the wild alarm of "Fire! fire!" reached far and loud into the surroundings cañons, and came back above the distant murmur of excited voices in faint, despairing echoes, "Fire! fire!" Out of a column of sooty smoke and kindling flame the white front of the big hotel seemed to totter in the wind-swayed wreaths about it; one corner of it was crowned with curling spikes of fire, that licked along the roof and lurked in fitful gleams around the eaves, lighting up the windows just below into momentary sheets of flashing brightness.

He gained the broad veranda where the carved pillars shone red in the warm reflection from the burning

woods, and opening wide the heavy hall door, shouted up the dark stairways in a voice that seemed to rend the very roof in its resounding vibrations, "Quick! Fire! fire! fire!" Who of all those slumberers realized the meaning of these words, as they awakened from sound and restful sleep, and staggering along through the densely dark passage-ways, jostled against each other in nameless terror! Somewhere there was fire, — from some devouring flame came the stifling cloud of smoke that filled the air, and some one's warning voice was sounding loud and awful from below. On the broad, crowded stairway, ringing with the voices of that wild procession, a dark form leaped from step to step, and sprang past like lightning to the landing above. It was Edward Dennett. And now the secret he had guarded so carefully against all gossiping tongues and irreverent curiosity was an open one. And yet what cared he, or even they who heard, in that terrible hour? Who even wondered that he called "Mabel!" in a clear, deep voice that was full of tenderness as well as strength? — who save one white-faced girl hastening down and out into the night?

"O fool! fool!" she whispered to herself. "It is all over. She will hear, and then she will know as I now do! I 'd rather die than see her happiness with him!" she murmured, with a groan that was half a hiss, and turning rushed with swift step back into the burning building. In the deep darkness behind the stairs she stood, thinking madly of her own defeat, of the bitterness that life held in store for her, firm in her resolve to die. But when the thick fumes of smoke began to stifle her, and a dull red glow fell on the white walls

around, tremblingly she pictured her own frail form clasped in the destroying grasp of the fire, and her desperate resolve grew more and more terrible as she thought of it. "Oh no! no! I must not wait here till almost too late, and then come out maimed and scarred for life," she said. "Let her have him! My lot cannot be such a misery that I should prefer this"; and gathering up her long white robe, she hastened out again into the hot winds that fanned the roaring flames. "I 'd better even take George Brooklyn," she whispered half aloud, while gliding through the veranda, crowded with half a dozen stalwart men hurrying out with a billiard-table. One of them turned roughly to see who jostled him, but beholding a slender girl, her white gown tinted crimson in the glare, and her long, shadowy waves of auburn hair floating out like a cloak around her, he said kindly, "Stand in that lattice, miss, until we get this down the steps. You will be out of the way, and will not get hurt there."

Nellie shrank back into the latticed end of the veranda, where the bright gleams of the fire shone through the clustering leaves and fell in tiny moons upon the floor. She waited with tremulous fear while the men carried their heavy burden down, when a light touch on her shoulder warned her that she was not alone. Turning she saw Nita's dark oval face illuminated in the weird, checkered light. "Are they all out?" asked the girl in a low, frightened voice,—"all? —Mabel and her aunt and the tall young man, Ned Dennett, from the mill,—and—and George, is he out, too? Say," she added in a whisper, "I thought I heard you speak his name just now. Are you sure he is out?"

"I cannot tell," said Nellie petulantly. "How do *I* know?" and hastening away, she thought she heard the low, pleading voice following her, but when she reached the foot of the steps she found that she was all alone. "I *will* be calm," she thought, as she paused a moment there. "No one shall ever know what I must bear this night."

A group of excited people formed a semi-circle out in front of the hotel, looking anxiously up at the smoking roof, while men were running out with boxes and trunks, with bundles of papers and articles of furniture, and depositing them in the nearest place of safety.

The handsome, swarthy Englishman who owned the hotel, hatless and in half-undress, stood in the rich lustre of the light, with the scorching breath from the woods blowing through his dark, glossy hair, and fanning his hot face beaded over with great drops of perspiration, while he shouted to the men to come away, — the rest must burn.

Along the brilliant pathway Nellie went, looking bewildered toward the assembled forms before her, and vaguely wondering if any of her friends were there.

Yes, there was Mr. Sevenoakes, beating a hasty retreat toward the mill, and his dainty wife leaning half-fainting in the arms of her friend; there was George Brooklyn, and Mabel too, coming toward her with outstretched arms and tearful eyes. "Oh, Nellie, Nellie!" she cried, "thank heaven you are safe, and Aunt Cynthia too! Here they come! See! Mr. Dennett is almost carrying her! Perhaps she has fainted. We could not get her to leave the room, for something troubled her. But he has made her come at last."

"Hush! Don't make a scene here!" said Nellie, calmly shrugging her shoulders and tossing back her hair. "You are talking too loud. People will remember all ridiculous behavior after this thing is over. For myself, I think it quite romantic to take part in such a scene, — it will make a fine subject for future recital to entranced hearers. In five minutes my upset nerves were steadied, and I am as unconcerned now as if all this was only a play. The only thing I object to is the costume. It is rather too scant for comfort. Though (low be it said!) perhaps I should be glad of an opportunity for the novel experience of appearing in it; the most uncomfortable thing about it being that I shall have to wear some unbecoming, old-fashioned travelling-dress home, for both my trunks are adding to that blazing pile before us. Ah! *you* took time to don a morning gown, I see, you piece of vanity, though the last hour threatened to claim you."

"Nellie, Nellie!" said Mabel, starting away unconscious of the words last spoken. "Come, let us see Aunt Cynthia, — if we can do anything to comfort her." But Nellie drew back, and let Mabel go alone to the place where, on the warm, grassy earth, out of danger of the fire, Edward Dennett tenderly laid his burden down. In the lurid light Nellie stood, tall, emotionless, like a statue, with no sign to attest her troubled spirit except her cold eyes flashing disdainfully as she watched Mabel and Edward Dennett moving to and fro around Mrs. Willis in the fitful shadows that vanished when some blazing bough shot up a momentary pinnacle of fire, and came hastening back again when the bright glare melted into the steady glow from the woods. Not

even her best, most exalted feelings could equal the natural innocence of that gentle girl on whom she looked so scornfully. She had no conception of Mabel's self-forgetting goodness, and so she only thought of her rival's exultant heart, and of her own defeated, bitter hopes. Not for the world would she turn her eyes away, though what she saw might kill her on the spot. Like some majestic savage queen she watched it all, immovable in her unspeakable anger, her bright eyes dark with distended pupils, and her white face transfigured into something magnificent in its marble pallor, if not beautiful in its self-extinguishing determination.

It was the supreme moment of her life,—not a moment when by some self-sacrificing act she had achieved great good and happiness to her fellow-beings, but a time when all the sentiment, the affection of her heart, perished at one stroke, and left instead a raging, crying bitterness, which she was striving with all her strength and pride to stifle and conceal.

There is something very sad in the utter extinguishment of the light that kindles the higher feelings of the heart. And what wonder that Nellie, selfish, ambitious, vain, in the hour when all that higher brightness was shut away, having none of her own to supply her empty soul, should unconsciously feel shame for her poverty, and summon all her pride to hide it. But she succeeded. Her face expressed no suggestion of what she felt when she saw Edward glance tenderly back at Mabel as he prepared to go, though it shot a poisoned dagger into her heart while she looked upon the picture.

But she saw in the next moment the strong, brave man outlined against the burning buildings, like the

figure of some valiant Spartan of old. She saw his face, it was young and handsome, and the broad, smooth brow, with the damp, bright waves of hair above it, giving courage by its own serenity; and she saw him raise his hands in warning as he said, above the din of lamenting voices, "Stand back! stand back! There's danger here!" A silence fell as the semi-circle quickly widened, and then she saw him pointing to the broad roof covered with a crown of flames, from which black fragments of roofing were caught up into the spurting jets of fire and smoke, and fell again like starry brands from heaven.

Scarcely half an hour had passed since awakening from that happy dream, and now Edward stood in the heart of a fiery scene that painted with its awful devastation the hues of the infernal regions over the placid, lovely face of nature.

The thick pine woods to the north of the hotel were hot and darkly red in a great threatening crescent around the little town, while crackling, sweaty boughs each moment broke loose from some glowing, flame-wrapped tree, and sent charry, fire-gemmed logs rolling in clouds of smoke down the slopes into the dry wild grasses, kindling afresh the element of destruction. Where on the gently rising hill the Royal Regina had proudly overlooked the clustering homes and the mill in the vale below, huge masses of fire roared and gulped with ravenous fury, and great, bloody, smoke-tipped forks of flame shot high into the starry zenith. The air was filled with hot, suffocating blasts like the breath from a furnace, and the wild oats, growing high in the sheltered nooks down by the mill, rustled and

crackled with each stifling wave, as if in emulous admiration of the raging carnival of terror. Edward paused but a moment in that broad pavilion of light. The next he was calling to the dazed and wondering crowds to hasten toward the edge of the woods and fight to save the town; and then he started away with swift step toward the mill.

Most of the men, awakened to their senses, hurried off in the direction of the burning rim of flame around the camp, where already scores of dark figures were outlined against the shining wall that leaped and roared and drove them steadily back.

Nellie, standing by George, in the richest glory of the flames, glanced shyly up at him, with eyes that twinkled through their long lashes, and illuminated a face otherwise as firm and set as marble. No one who looked upon her would know that at that moment the ruin and desolation about her had no place in her thoughts; nor could they see the remotest sign of the tumult of bitterness that held sway in her heart. With a self-control almost supernatural she stood, and with piercing eye that struck terror to the cowardly man beside her, she looked him through and through, and made him feel as if he would gladly have fallen upon his knees and confessed his sins to her if she would only release him from that all-comprehending gaze.

Where now were all his fascinating arts? The ready smile that sometimes concealed his trifling sneer of self-felt superiority? The earnest glances of his fine dark eyes, and the tranquillity of his broad, white forehead? He remained motionless, with head half

bowed, powerless in that hour when all his little pretences he knew would fail of their effect, — sneaking, mean, helpless.

"For heaven's sake, Nellie, what are you looking at me like that for?" he broke out at last. "Isn't there anything else for you to do?"

"I was just thinking," she answered, deliberately measuring each word, and still looking at him through her long, dark lashes, — "just wondering how it happened that you managed to get all dressed on such short notice, — even to your necktie; and yet you did n't stop to wash your hands. They are very black for a gentleman like you, Sir George."

"I 've been fighting the fire," he answered, hurriedly, and striving vainly in his confusion to think of something else to say.

"Then why did n't you continue in your good work?" she questioned, without allowing him one moment's relief from her merciless stare.

"I was looking for that Spanish girl, — Logan's daughter, — Nita, you know. Have you seen her?"

"O, never mind her. She is hiding around somewhere, I presume, ready to spring on me from some covert place because I 'm talking to you. I guess I don't want to risk such a fate, so you 'd better go back to your former occupation," she added, shrugging her shoulders, but without moving her eyes. "You 're a tropical sunbeam, and need n't mind the heat. You were born for such. In the next world you 'll be sure to inhabit the equatorial regions, where water boils in the shade. So go along and help fight. Your garb might excite some one else's surprise, my friend, and

then the question would be raised as to the origin of the —"

"I guess you 'll find I 'm not the only one in a surprising costume for a midnight fire. Dennett 's out in a well-finished toilet; maybe he 'll have to answer for that, and some other things besides"; and George turned to go, but Nellie followed him a step or so, saying in a shrill, sharp whisper close to his ear, still looking stonily into his downcast face, "Well may you say that, you wretched fool! You need n't suppose I do not know that your evil-doing, your headstrong, foolhardy wickedness, has brought ruin to all of us now. I only live for my revenge, and I 'll have it too; for this work of yours is not wholly unknown. Find the Spanish girl, indeed! I shall find her, too, and get that secret which troubles you now."

George, hastening down the slope with Nellie's words burning in his brain, espied a group of men by the mill, and among them Mr. Sevenoakes. More from instinct than reason he hastened to one whom he counted as a friend in his hour of misery, but Edward Dennett, running up from the other side, rather spoiled the effect of his arrival.

"What 's to be done, Dennett?" said the little man wildly. In the great crises of life some trifling incident often absorbs all our thoughts for a moment, and impresses itself upon our memories as inseparably associated with events of such awful magnitude we cannot at first comprehend them. And so Edward could not help thinking how natural it was that this little Sevenoakes, so self-sufficient, so fine, so imperturbable in his hours of repose, should be utterly resourceless

and dependent in his time of need. Even in that exciting moment his hurriedly donned coat set without a wrinkle, a silk handkerchief relieved the bareness of his neck, and the fitful glory of the fire played on his glossy, spotless shirt-bosom. But his face was a study of despair and appealing helplessness. "The mill will go if we don't do something quick to keep that back," he cried, pointing to the wind-driven deluge of fire that was coming toward them. "Can't we get up a little force to fight it out of the grass?"

"It would do no good," said Edward, hurriedly; "they could never make any headway against such odds. I went across the creek to look at the old hose we once used to work the placers, up the gulch. I must have help in fastening it to the main water-pipe. Get others to bring the thing over. Some one come with me"; and he ran up the slope, following the course of the great iron pipe that brought water from a spring high up the hill back of the hotel to supply the mill and the town with water purer and clearer than the creek could furnish. George hurried after him. It was but a little way to the outskirts of that grove near the hotel. "We must begin here," said Edward, pausing a moment, and glancing around to see whose footstep sounded behind him through the crackling grass. His face pictured his disappointment when he saw who followed, but he went on examining quickly the joints of the pipe, and venturing as near as he dared to the place where it entered the burning wood. "This is the only salvation for the mill," he said to George, dropping on one knee and looking critically at a place where a

small stream of water trickled along the ground. "The wind is so high that while we are fighting the regular advance line of the fire the sparks and rolling logs will kindle the grass in a dozen different places ahead of us. We must stop the danger from this source by setting the stream from the hose on the nearest of these trees, and getting the fire under control in this direction. Then the ground can be flooded all over the slope, which will give us time to turn a shower on the roof of the mill without fear from the burning grass. We had best put the hose on right here." He looked around as he spoke, to see if the men were bringing it yet. In the bright light he saw their figures distinctly down by the mill, so lifting the leaking pipe, he placed a piece of loose timber which George handed him under it for a support, and started off to assist the men dragging the heavy hose up the hill, Mr. Sevenoakes, daintily holding on to the nozzle and shouting for greater haste, bringing up the rear.

George was alone up there by the water-pipe. The issues of deliverance or destruction were in his power. For a moment a blind dizziness seized him, and the whirling, sparkling woods grew dim and indistinct to his fading vision. Then through it all rose up Nellie's white face with its relentless stare, that seemed to penetrate his inmost soul, and her last low words to him blended with the hiss and roar of the fire. He started as if goaded to madness by the remembrance of it; and then with a swift glance at the men ascending the hill with bended heads, he darted forward, picking his way with care under the kindling branches, where the pipe

lay. An avenue down through the trees he found, leading under showers of sparks and dropping twigs to the dry bed of the stream coming down from the hilltop, across which the pipe was stretched. Just on the other side it was lost in the underbrush, then converted into one mass of steady, all-consuming flame.

Standing on the bank just above the place where the pipe crossed the stream-bed, George loosened a huge round stone jutting out of the bank, and turning his face away to avoid the scorching breath of the burning bushes, he hurled it with all his strength against the pipe. The same instant a blast of water struck him full on the side of his face, blinding him with its hot flood, and causing him to fall headlong across the steaming pipe into the blazing grass beneath. With a smothered outcry he regained his feet, while the whirling scenes around him came slowly back to his stunned senses. The water-pipe was sending up tall, crystal jets, on which the light played in fitful twinkles as they broke into sparkling sprays, and fell to the blazing ground and over the hissing pipe. The trees that had tottered and swum before his eyes stood still and held out black, shiny, charred arms against the blacker background of sky, and in the dry creek-bed the water was forming little dark pools and rivulets between the stained rocks.

Dazed, maddened with pain, he plunged through the woods and reached the clearing, unseen by the crowd of men vainly striving to get a full volume of water out of the broken pipe. Where should he go? What would he do, with his guilty face unsightly from those

torturing burns? Passing down the slope, he saw still the same group standing with wild faces upturned toward the burning hotel, the roof of which shot up each moment higher and more awful banners of fire. If he could only see Knowles, amid the sea of faces that swum and swayed before his bloodshot eyes! In vain he looked, but at length he caught sight of Mabel and her aunt, a little out of the thickest crowd. Rushing across the brilliant scene, he tried to call to Mabel, but ere he could make himself heard, a smothered chorus of cries broke from the assembled throng. He stood spellbound, gazing at the awful picture before him. On the hotel balcony, framed with a mass of devouring fire which threatened every moment to let its forked, smoke-tipped tongues lick up the frail morsel of humanity, stood Nita, the wind blowing her thick hair about her shapely head, her arms outstretched, and her dark face grandly beautiful in its speechless agony of fear. Then looking upward to the smoke clouds that floated overhead, she cried loud and long, "Help! help! In the name of heaven, quick! I have something to tell!" and with one long shriek she flung herself over the railing to the ground. Some one sprang forward, and lifting up the limp form carried it away.

He saw the crowd draw near, with low murmurs of pity and alarm; he saw Mabel, her cheeks pale and her hands trembling, bending over it; he heard some one say softly, "She still lives! We shall yet know what she has to tell."

"All is lost!" he whispered, almost aloud; "it was Nellie who said that"; and then with one despairing

little spurts of steam and flaky cinders, and died with gushing hisses under the cool showers.

The first rain of the season had come with a twofold blessing. Not only would those floods renew the wondrous beauties of nature, but they would also preserve her treasured glories which a thousand years had nourished. No danger now that those storm-torn clouds would hurry away before the impatient wind, when that thirsting earth below cried aloud for the opening of the flood-gates.

As the dim light stole over the devastated town, the scenes of midnight had changed into something more terrible in their blank desolation. No longer the red fires leaped and roared, but over the ruins of many a home little wreaths of smoke hovered, and charred trees stood up bare and lifeless against the bleak sky, as if to show what destruction a day can bring. Ah! who could paint the excitement of the dark forms gathered thick around the mill? Who among them could reason calmly, could plan, could hope?

Here a little group of men, heedless of the lowering sky and the unconquerable flames that had threatened all the beauteous foothill country around them, discussed the incidents of the past night. Good thing that the mill and the mine machinery were saved. Work would go on now, anyway, and the prospect of rebuilding the town would be better; strange how the water-pipe was managed. Smart fellow, that Ned Dennett, to think the heat must have bursted it; and mighty plucky too, when he rushed after something to fix it with, and then followed it right into the burning woods in search of the break. Whew! what a

power they got on at last! — not any too early either. It just cleared a path round the mill, and saved the whole thing.

Presently a new member joined the group, and asked where he could find Mr. Sevenoakes. No one knew. Perhaps he was in the machinery-room of the mill, looking after his wife, who was prostrated by the shock of the fire. Had Logan's daughter told what she had to say? No, not that any one had heard; she had told her mother to bring Edward Dennett to her, and they were in Brooklyn's little laboratory now.

Then a small party of men came up, among them Mr. Sevenoakes, and Knowles, whose thin face was fairly distorted by excitement. "There was something mysterious about the starting of this fire," said the smooth-tongued little man. "I 'm quite assured of it. And yet I 'm more than sorry to feel that the trouble among my workmen may have had something to do with it. The proof is pretty strong that the fire grew out of the strike. Who of you men can tell me anything about it?"

Two or three of the mill hands lounged nearer the speaker, and mumbled something about knowing more than they cared to tell.

"If you are in possession of the slightest clew, t most trifling fact, I ask you as gentlemen to revea What 's that, Crane? Speak up and tell us if know anything."

Crane, in reality anxious for the opportunity t his knowledge, fell back a step or two, and cowed s what by the dignified presence of the superintend who had always seemed to him mighty as a king, s

that he had caught rumors floating around, from what source he knew not, that "some one" had boasted that there would be an end of the strike in one night's work. That was about all he knew. He had understood, however, that the "some one" was Ned Dennett, who intended to commit some mischief to the mill or works, and have it appear as if the strikers were guilty of the act, and thus bring about a settlement of the troubles with that prejudice against them.

Mr. Sevenoakes glanced cautiously around the assembled group, and satisfying himself that it was safe to speak, said calmly that Knowles had a little story to tell, and perhaps it was best that all present should listen. He alone felt himself incompetent to consider such an enormous crime.

"I 'll tell you, gentlemen," began Knowles, nervously, "the case which I shall lay before you is one of great importance; and did I not feel bound to give my testimony by the calls of justice, my tongue would never reveal what I have to tell. It is doubly painful to me, because I fear that the person who would corroborate my evidence, who was an eye-witness of the act with me, is now beyond my reach, — a curious complication of incidents depriving me of his support, which I shall hereafter make clear.

"I presume it was well known among you, gentlemen, that Mr. Brooklyn and myself were warm friends. Some time ago, he confided to me a little secret about a love-affair he had got into with Logan's daughter, who, as it has since proved to be, has been married for over a year to a fellow who used to be around quite often in these parts, — one John Gloucester. Last night George

confided to me the fact that this Gloucester had just arrived from Arizona, where he had been engaged in mining, trying to make a strike, and that he feared things would be pretty hot for him, since the newcomer was no milk-sop. He said that the Logan girl had confessed these facts, of which he had theretofore been ignorant, and that she had promised to meet him in the woods up north of here, somewhere near twelve o'clock, — at any rate, long enough after the arrival of the stage to have things quieted down, since she was afraid of her husband, — and they could then arrange how to manage their case. Brooklyn asked me to accompany him, as he did n't feel quite safe about going out alone, for fear the girl, no doubt desiring to clear herself, might betray him, and so I consented.

"We started out about midnight, and took the little trail up yonder that leads into the woods, moving along carefully, so that other night-owls might not discover us before we did them. Before we had gone far, however, we ascertained that our precautions had not been useless. We caught sight of somebody moving slowly in the brush, and concealing ourselves, we watched to see if we could make out who it might chance to be. Then our suspicions were aroused by seeing the person kneel down in the grass, and strike a match on an old dead tree-trunk. Not knowing quite who it was, or what he was trying to do, we waited a moment to think what course it was wisest to take. Then quick as lightning we saw a blaze creeping along in the grass, near the tree-stump, and with one lurch we sprang out of our concealment. Our movement frightened the unknown incendiary, and starting up in his haste, he

dropped his match-safe, — here it is, gentlemen, with his name upon it; and a sudden burst of light from the tall hay blossoms near showed us unmistakably, — Edward Dennett."

A suppressed murmur ran around through the assembled crowd, but no one made any comment whatever, — only two or three of the older listeners drew back a little and put their hands to their heads. Knowles waited anxiously for the breathless silence to be broken by some expression of opinion, but finding no one would venture to speak, he continued with his story.

"We all can see his motive, — in fact, it has just been stated by our friend Crane here. He wanted to scare our worthy superintendent" — with an awkward bow, and a spasmodic gesture with his thin hand toward Mr. Sevenoaks — "into a settlement of the strike in his favor. For of course the fire would be charged to the account of the miners, which would irrefutably prove his theory of the matter. Besides, would it not be possible that a cool-headed fellow like Dennett might bide his time for a little chance at revenge? Well, whoever sees it, or whoever don't, the fact remains.

"And one of the strangest features of the occurrence happened after the beginning of the fire. Brooklyn and I set to work to extinguish it, fighting with all our strength, and believing that our efforts would be successful in a short time. So, forgetful of Nita and our midnight errand, we decided with dismay that the high wind was making terrible headway with the fire, and that some one from town must be called to assist; but before we could make the move, the Spanish girl came dashing along the path, and, angry because we had

failed to meet her at the place appointed, accused Brooklyn of being the author of the fire. She had him in a tight place, you see. She vowed she would get her husband to swear that he also witnessed the crime, which would make our evidence no better than theirs, — if George did not submit to the arrangements she suggested. He was a high-strung fellow, as you all know, gentleman, and he refused to accede to any such proposal, but obtained her promise to meet him somewhere else latter on. I have some proof that the quarrel was renewed at the second meeting, and when, later, Nita informed her husband, doubtless poor Brooklyn had a stormy time, and was forced or thought it most prudent to leave.

"Thus I am left alone with this story; and yet the chain of circumstantial evidence is almost complete, — here is the presence of Gloucester, of Nita also, who will most likely confirm what I have said, here is the match-safe, and best of all, here is Dennett, — we all saw him last night, — dressed when the fire broke out, though he ought to have been safely in bed, coming from the woods, the first to give the alarm of fire; he easily got ahead of George and me, considering that we stayed to fight it."

Knowles paused again, but still no one spoke, until after a painful period of suspense Mr. Sevenoakes broke the silence. "You have heard this story," he said. "What action shall we take to verify positively its entire truth? Is it possible that Edward Dennett could be the cause of all this ruin around us?"

"Humph!" growled a coarse miner from the background; "hain't it jest been proved?"

"Mighty poor show for him now," added another. "He 's done the whole business."

"Well, well," continued Mr. Sevenoakes, growing a little more excited, "then you all give it as your unanimous opinion that Edward Dennett has committed this great wrong? What shall we do next?"

Out of low grumbles and murmurs of "String him up!" and "Poison him!" came some one's advice to have him arrested, and punished by law, since the evidence was so strong; but a firm voice from the outer edge of the crowd called, "Hold!" and Logan was pushed forward to have his say.

There was a troubled look on his honest face, but he stood calmly and manfully before the hissing group, and defended his friend. "We don't say ye have n't told it all straight," he said to Knowles; "and yit such a mon as George would do the manest thing in the woruld, and he might be in it, too. Let us not be harud on the lad. We 've seen him raised right here among us; we all know the ould folks to be good people; and yez have jest been after saying he wuz the only wan as could fix the fire at all. We don't know what he 'll have to say when he comes out, — he 's in there now with — with her"; and he pointed quickly toward the laboratory, that he might use his hand to wipe away something briny which gathered in his eyes. "She wuz my only girul," he went on, pathetically; "and yit that mon Brooklyn could stale her away, and yez niver talk of punishing him. Who knows that Dennett meant to start the fire? Come, now, boys, let 's not be harud on the lad. Tell him to clear out, and let that settle it."

Some of the miners pushed Logan back, and he wandered off toward the mill, as if anxious to be within easy call of those in the laboratory, and satisfied also that he could do no more for Edward. But he had done enough, for before any one could speak, Mr. Sevenoakes cleared his throat, and said he guessed that Logan was about right. "No one knows just what he meant to do, as Logan says," continued he. "Quite likely we shall never find out; for it is more than probable he would deny having had anything whatever to do with the fire. Still, no one else could possibly have had any object in the commission of such an act, since the strike had already been settled to the satisfaction of everybody, I fancy, except Dennett himself. As Knowles says, the circumstantial evidence is very clear against him, and we will ask him to explain this damaging evidence to our satisfaction, or he may find this place hereafter of a temperature something similar to what it was last night."

A loud laugh from the miners drowned Mr. Sevenoakes's voice at this juncture, and when the hilarity subsided, the glib tongue was saying that it was a pity George had been forced to take such an ignominious departure. "He was a pretty good fellow, as young men go these days," added the speaker. "The trouble with him seemed to be that he indulged in too many flirtations. They kept him in hot water most of the time. I advised him, however, about this last, but it did n't seem to have any effect on him. I 'm sorry, though, he did n't prefer to stay and take a thrashing. He would have had plenty to help defray his doctoring expenses."

Another laugh signalized the acceptance of the superintendent's last words, and low murmurs of affirmance from the miners, while the little man, having finished his speech, walked away toward the mill, carefully brushing a stray cinder off his sleeve.

The black crowd separated into clusters of three and four, eagerly discussing the last news. Knowles was the centre of attraction, and willingly rehearsed his story over again several times for the edification of individual hearers. Each glance at the smoking ruins around seemed to call forth louder denunciations of Edward Dennett from the excited throng. Ah! who could be calm and reasonable — not to say charitable — in that desolate dawn, after such a sleepless night amid wild unearthly scenes, when their bewildered senses were scarcely able to grasp the magnitude of the awful change that had transpired!

The light grew stronger. Over in the east a rose-colored flush brightened the rim of the distant snow-peaks, and cast a soft reflection over the cold grayness of the stormy morning. Deeper and deeper grew the tint in the horizon, until full daylight struggled through a mass of gold and crimson clouds that banked the east. The rain that had fallen gently since dawn began to descend in welcome showers, and the waiting crowds that had defied the scanty drops began to take refuge in the sheds around the mill, while the conversation changed from the absorbing one of crime to speculations about the storm and the fire.

Loud ejaculations and incessant talk proceeded from under the low roofs, where the men sat on piles of lumber and worn-out machinery, waiting,— they scarcely

knew for what. At first they looked for daylight breaking gray and coldly over the distant hills; but now, when its vailed brightness was abroad with promise of a gleam of its full brilliancy through a rift in the eastern clouds, they only watched with strained eyes the laboratory door. Twice it had opened softly, and a mysterious, sad-faced figure had beckoned to some one outside; and yet the anxious crowds knew only that Nita lay pale and mangled in that little room, that the physician had gravely put all questioners aside with a shake of his head, and that some secret which the dying lips might reveal was all but lost.

Suddenly the door swung open wide, and subdued sounds from within greeted the ears of the anxious listeners. Several forms were moving about, and finally Edward Dennett came slowly down the steps with a solemn face, followed by the rest. Out into the rain the crowds pressed toward the laboratory door, the miners hissing boisterously as they drew near, ready to greet him with their story of the fire. But he raised his hand in warning, and, as if by magic, silence fell over the assembled throng, for slowly and sadly they that followed him bore Nita's frail form, sanctified by the awful touch of death. The rain seemed almost to cease falling on those set features, as they bore her out, and at last a ray of sunlight, escaping through the riven vapors, fell tenderly on that calm face, strangely beautiful in its snowy pallor, and over the waiting groups, standing reverently, with heads uncovered, while the strange procession moved along. They were taking her home, — all that was left of her, — to that home which her poor, discontented spirit had never bright-

ened, — to that rude woodland abode which yet seemed a perfect setting to her wild, impulsive beauty. Were there not in those deep, mysterious woods traces still of how her passionate heart had suffered and been tempted? Under an old arbor did there not lie a little gleaming dagger, wet and dimmed with the dripping rain slowly trickling through the rose leaves? In an old, hollow stump was there not a crumpled paper, torn and ragged, once folded and guarded so carefully, when it seemed to her a passport to the luxuriant fairy-land her imagination painted?

Ah, well for all these things there seemed a compensation! For they who stood around and gazed upon the dumb, senseless clay surely felt that no soul was there. Did they not almost see it, — a poor, narrow thing, starved, misguided, unable to expand in this lower, worldly atmosphere, hiding in the wing of the archangel, to be borne with trembling pity up through the sun-rifted cloud, where the base passions of the flesh have lost their charm and power, and into the inexpressible raptures that abound in the bright, star-hung steeps of heaven?

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### SAD MEMORIES.

Still the heartache comes, but the heartache goes,
For the heartsease blooms in the grasses deep,
And the passing years will hide our woes,
And lay them low in a dreamless sleep.
If thou hast a heart, that heart must ache;
Or if its troubled waves would rest,
No rosy light of love must break;
Be it calm and cold as a marble breast.
No heartache comes with a bitter pain
To the marble heart in its icy chain;
Never do marble lips complain.

*Selected.*

THE poor Doctor! What change was this that was coming with such a relentless, hopeless blight over his life? How many of his friends would have echoed such a thought, could they have looked into his mind in those days that followed the fading of his dream! How many a heart that silently beat its gratitude to him would have warmed with an infinite longing to relieve his loneliness, if only by a single touch of kindness!

But he still drove over the dusty roads and across the dry, golden pastures, with the same kindly face, and the same warm, generous heart. No line of sadness darkened his brow; no selfish brooding over bygone woes stayed his charitable hand. In this valley of sorrow he walked alone. No one shared its anguish;

no one mourned his dead with him. There was just a slight difference in his manner,—it grew more hurried and nervous, as if he was trying to drive out thought by a ceaseless round of activity,—and that was the only index which the outside world could find to his aching heart.

Lois went no more to the hospital on her mission of mercy to the suffering, pleading that Mrs. Mills could not well spare her, though the Doctor guessed, with a feeling of uncontrollable pain, that this was not her real reason. Lois could not endure the thought of going to Mrs. Hunman's again to distress Nettie, but she felt a delicacy in saying she objected to going there, without telling him why, which, of course, she could not do, and hence she thought best not to go at all.

So the summer wore away, and melted into autumn, with its yellow hazes lying in stagnant masses over the broad fields, and weaving and tangling, day after day, in a slow, weary flight through the ancient slopes.

But it happened that one afternoon when the Doctor called, Lois was in the kitchen, and having a letter to deliver to her, he ventured out into those warm, mysterious precincts, and found her making bread.

"Find a chair, Doctor," she said; "I know you are afraid of me now, with my hands in this dough."

He did not obey, however, but went and stood by her while she sifted the flour, watching the white flakes pile themselves up into long pyramids and deep drifts, and the light falling through them make tints of gold deep down in the snowy heaps. There was a look of weariness on her face, that even the late rose which she

had gathered for her hair could not brighten, nor the pleasant smile with which she greeted him hide.

Of late, Lois herself might have been a subject for the Doctor's solicitude, though she tried to mask her care-worn face under her brightest smiles whenever he was around. Her school would begin in two weeks more, yet she dreaded the first day like the renunciation of her sweetest hopes. She could scarcely settle in her mind the thought of another year of work within those dingy gray walls, without a breath of the pure, cool air of the Sierras. Yet it was not homesickness that haunted her, nor yet altogether a want of change. But night after night as she lay down to sleep, dreams came to her that brought back the early scenes of her love and hope, and he to whom she had given all her heart came in them and thrilled her soul anew with the strange raptures she had never hoped to feel again; but he always vanished with a grace that was a delight, which then changed quickly to false and leering cruelty, that left in her heart pangs of insufferable pain and desolation. Clouds hovered over the world, tinged with a leaden sombreness, from which faces, blanched with the seal of death, showed their ghastly yet familiar features; and then black palls, falling slowly from the far, dim folds of bluish clouds, wrapped her in a strange oblivion, and shut out all her melancholy visions.

Day by day the renewal of old scenes came back; little melodies of song, freighted with tender associations, thronged to her mind, seeming to insist that they be sung again; and irresistible impulses compelled her to review each word and thought, each token

of remembrance, that recalled those departed days. It was not the happy, bright Lois of old who responded so languidly to Jimmie Mills's questions, but some one else who sat at the window in the twilight with a borrowed shadow on her brow, and looked out in moody silence. These were not hours of peaceful reverie, but times when her heart ached with a wild tumult of old love and pain, when the autumn breezes, rustling in the leaves, seemed hurrying on to tell her of a nameless woe, when the gathering shadows seemed creeping even into her life. "This is the end of all my love," she thought. "This is the last faint kindling of the ember hidden so deep in its misty ashes." And the voice of fate seemed to tell her, through all those sad hours of recollection, "This is the end."

There was something so bitter in this stirring of her buried hopes, such a relentless agony, destroying all their softened, time-mellowed tranquillity, that she knew that nevermore could she cherish the sweetness of her sorrow. She strove against it. She tried to keep the spark from fading utterly, dreading the searing of her heart to those sad and tender memories; but she strove in vain. Other things, — she scarcely knew what, — other feelings, were battling for the supremacy. So she gave up to the inexorable mandate of fate, "This is the end."

And so, on this hazy day of autumn, when the Doctor surprised her going about her daily tasks, though she felt still the same dismal forebodings, there was a sudden relief in his coming that she clung to, loth to go back to her desolate thoughts.

He gave her the letter he had brought. It was from

Knowles, who had gone away from the hospital into the mountain mines, and wrote to thank her for all her kindness during his past illness. This brought back vividly her visits to the hospital, and she felt that one of those long, pleasant rides with her good friend would do much to dispel her settled gloom.

"Doctor," she said at last, very timidly for straightforward Lois, "does your hospital still receive visitors?"

A mild hope sprang up in his breast, a genial current of pleasure, when he heard her question.

"Yes," he answered; "such a visitor as you would be, at any time."

"Well, then," she said, looking up to him with something of her old archness, "may I go with you again some day? I need the change and the occupation, but I shall have to make a short stay. We will not be able to take dinner with Mrs. Hunman."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to arrange everything as you wish," he answered, with more truth than bashfulness this time.

Then she went on with her bread-making, scooping up the soft, light flour, sprinkling it in little clouds over the dough, and kneading the great elastic mass about, all the while talking to him with a desperation that seemed afraid to allow him a moment's reflection, for fear he would go. So he lingered, not so much to listen to her talk as to watch the pretty picture, and feel something of the old spell that had once come over him there, saddened though it had to be now with hopelessness. After the Doctor took his departure, Lois plunged deeper than ever into her melancholy

feelings. The brightness that he brought seemed not to belong to her, and it vanished with him.

Next day, when she had arranged to take her drive, she felt no better, though the Doctor's watchful kindness gave her confidence. So she went on talking with him, keeping up the steady flow of thought, and appearing quite cheerful, though all the landscape borrowed a sodden, dreary aspect, and the skies, hazy and pale gold with the late year's mellow sunlight, seemed dark, as if clouded by a long and terrible eclipse.

When they arrived at the hospital, and Lois went again through the silent wards, finding so many new faces and so many things to do, the nameless dread and horror she had been fighting back yielded somewhat to her happier thoughts.

Just as she was preparing to go away, Mrs. Kent came to her and said that a young man had been brought there a day or two before by a person who said he had been burned in a mine explosion. "He occupies a little room just at the head of the stairs, and you had better step in and see him; please take this sponge to bathe his hands, for he has a fever," she added. Lois found the sufferer lying on a narrow cot in the darkened room, with his face entirely hidden in dampened cloths. He did not moan nor complain, nor even speak, when she came in and asked if she might do something for him, but he stirred slightly, and made a movement to raise the cloths from his face. She bent over him and carefully laid them aside, turning to get the cooling sponge with which to bathe his wounds, as if to put off the sight of his suffering as long as possible. But when she looked back again, she

saw the face with a distinctness she could never more forget,—that same familiar face that had haunted her restless pillow night after night; those same dark eyes that had once seemed to her to beam with the tenderest truth and affection, and reveal a soul replete with honesty and nobleness; that same clustering hair, glossy and damp, falling over a broad, white forehead; and alas! that well-remembered voice which she had heard at midnight in the sobbing winds through many a weary watch, that had once whispered burning words of love to her, that had seemed to cry out with ringing earnestness in a last long farewell call, saying now, just as he used to say it, with the old familiar accent, "Lois!"

Was it a dream now that his face, with all its hideous scars and burns, should whirl and writhe beneath her gaze, that his voice should sound like a faint, far, hissing ring? Was it sleep when a darkness came through it all and wrapped her senses in oblivion?

A fortunate thing it was that Dr. Knapp, who had followed Lois up the corridor, should step in to see that the sufferer's burns were not too long exposed to the air, and should arrive just in time to catch the fainting girl in his arms.

"Ah! the sight of blisters was rather shocking to her nerves," said the Doctor to Mrs. Kent, who came hurrying into the room.

It was only an addition to the excitement when he turned to see George Brooklyn sitting up, all the horror of his burned and suffering face shown to its fullest extent, and heard him, with a wild, half-delirious cry, call "Lois!" once again.

"There is something strange here," the Doctor thought as he carried the unconscious girl hurriedly out of the room, leaving Mrs. Kent to attend to her patient. When Lois recovered, and said she would prepare to go home, he ventured to ask, in a rather significant way, if there was anybody she would like to see, refraining from mentioning any one in particular.

"No," said Lois, with such composure that he almost felt himself deceived about the cause of her fainting; but still he thought it wise to refer to it as little as possible.

On their way home, however, Lois herself spoke of it. "I scarcely thought myself so weak as I proved to be this afternoon," she said. "I'm so worn out with caring for Mrs. Mills that a little thing will quite upset me now; and my surprise at meeting some one whom I supposed to be dead entirely overcame my strength. I fear I should not have decided to give up my vacation, though I could scarcely do otherwise when that accident happened to Mrs. Mills. But I think I shall go away now, to spend the remainder of my vacation, even if I cannot succeed in getting an extension of it."

When they arrived at Mrs. Mills's gate she held out her hand to say good by; but the Doctor's considerate thought suggested that he might go into the house to tell of Lois's fainting-spell, and thus better explain her sudden departure.

His stay was somewhat longer then usual, and twilight had settled over the town when he went away.

Lois thanked him with a new gratitude in her voice as she bade him good by in the vine-covered porch, and her manner betrayed so much dependence on him,

such mute, despairing helplessness, that he longed to shelter her in his loving protection. But something held him back; and so he left her to struggle with her grief alone, only looking around to see her standing in the vine-wreathed door with the cool tendrils swaying in knotted festoons between him and his lovely picture, and the soft radiance of the hall-lamp floating down upon the halo of silken, wind-blown hair around her head.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE PARTING.

Whispering tongues can poison truth,
One kiss, — so ends all record of my crime!
It is the seal upon the tomb of hope,
By which, like some lost, sorrowing angel, sits
Sad Memory evermore.

*Lady of Lyons.*

THE stormy day was almost over. To Mabel it had been a strange one, — so strange that she could scarcely realize she was not dreaming as she recalled its terrible events. Yesterday she had taken that ride with George out to the water-stained rock-wall, and they had come back into the little town just as a gorgeous sunset was lighting up its hundred westward windows into mirrors of flashing gold. To-day no windows caught the fire of the dying sunlight, for a flame more potent had been there before, and all that remained of that rude, flourishing camp which had so often led her thoughts into the fascinating associations of the southern mines was a smouldering mass of charred and ash-powdered ruin. They were at Mrs. Dennett's awaiting the morrow's stage, which would take them away toward their city home. "But it will not be home very long," Mrs. Willis had tearfully declared, when speaking of their return. Vainly Mabel had tried to comprehend something of her aunt's despair.

"We are beggars," the old lady had said. "Mabel,

all that we had for the coming years was consumed in the flames last night; and now we are left in a world that will hereafter look as dreary as that camp across the hill. What we possessed — and goodness knows it was a fortune small enough! — I had converted into diamonds, and I actually took them with me, I was so fearful for their safety, so distrustful of every one. Who would ever guess that I carried any wealth in that little iron box, which served for a medicine-chest as well? I was so sure that no burglar could ever find them there, that I congratulated myself I had a hiding-place secure against those perils, and I even imagined that nothing would ever harm them."

"Well, don't mind it so much, Aunt Cynthia," Mabel had said, to comfort her. "We shall get along somehow, I am sure. We 've got the house at home, you know."

"Yes," Mrs. Willis had assented fiercely, "we can go there and live till we starve to death. It will serve to hide our skeletons from a too curious world, that is all; for skeletons there will surely be."

"Then let us sell the house and come to some little town here among the mountains. It is so beautiful, so full of dreamy quiet and inspiration. I have been very happy here, aunt; for we are relieved of all the obligations of the old life, and there has been, besides, a peace and beauty in this existence that nothing else can borrow. I call this my little sky-domed fort among the hills. Perhaps I could teach, and we could let our lives pass happily and untroubled — "

"Bah! don't talk of caging yourself in a mountain-pass as if you had no higher ambition than a wild ani-

mal," Aunt Cynthia had interrupted. "You are just beginning life with interests and ambitions that in no way agree with such idiotic sentiment. Pass happily, indeed! You 'd bury yourself here, and be an old maid, I 'll warrant. How would you fancy that, my lady?"

"Perhaps it would n't be so very awful," Mabel had returned, smiling; "and then, aunt, perhaps I should n't be an old maid."

"Well, we shall not live in these forsaken wilds, rest assured. That settles it."

But somehow Mabel could not feel very miserable about their poverty, though she realized that their position was indeed greatly changed.

When evening drew near she found the old crimson chair by the western window, and sat looking out upon the rain-beaten world. All day the clouds had hung heavy with rain, though afternoon had brought an abatement of the storm, and now when night gave warning of its coming, a narrow belt of clear sky shone above the bank of dense purple clouds that rested on the horizon. "It is something like my sky," she thought. "One little window of light dispels so much of storm and gloom." Truly the day had been a severe one for Mabel. After the fierce excitement of the night, the morning had brought her new anxiety. A temporary shelter in the mill had been provided for the ladies after the danger to it from fire was over, and Mabel had found a secluded corner where she had soothed her distracted aunt into a restful sleep. But the old lady's repose had not been long, for when a few minutes later Mabel returned, Aunt Willis had forsaken her place of rest. Through and through the

building Mabel had searched for her in vain. And at last venturing out in the desperation of her alarm, she had come upon a disconsolate figure sitting in the rain on a gray rock by the creek margin, shedding bitter tears over some unknown sorrow. Every effort had been unavailing to reveal the cause of this strange grief until long after their arrival at Mrs. Dennett's. Then as if her horrible secret had weakened her fierce determination not to reveal it, even before a day was past, Mrs. Willis summoned the whole household to her and told her story. "The excitement and the trouble of last night have preyed upon her mind to an extent far beyond what she is able to endure," Mrs. Dennett had privately said to Mabel. "We must try to calm her, Miss Willis, and lead her thoughts into another channel. Then perhaps she will be able to rest a while." But the sympathetic, motherly friend had no conception of the difficulties in the way. Mrs. Willis was not a person to be quieted or made to rest at other people's pleasure or bidding, and Mabel's efforts were utterly unavailing. The mortifications, the trials of the day, had left her nearly exhausted, and as she sank into the soft old crimson chair, a great lull of relief came over her, like the calm that succeeds some devastating hurricane.

But amidst all her anxieties there had been a ray of comfort, which like the crystal streak of sky out in the west had shed a soft glory to light up all the dark, cloud-curtained heavens. She took a certain pleasure in recalling how Edward had entered the mill immediately after he had come out of the laboratory from his visit to poor Nita, and after inquiring for the com-

forts of all, had told Mrs. Willis that he should insist on having her accept an invitation for herself and Mabel and Nellie to share the shelter of his own home. Then he had gone out, and in an hour or so returned with a comfortable old farm-carriage to drive them across the hill and through the old town to his mother's house. He had shown a mild surprise when his friendly invitation to Mrs. Sevenoakes and other ladies, as yet unprovided with shelter, had been declined with chilling politeness. But Mabel did not think it at all unusual when she recalled the stylish little Mrs. Sevenoakes's narrow-minded vanity, and felt just a trifle indignant to think that such whole-souled generosity should be scorned by those even unworthy to receive it. But how quickly that slight unpleasantness had passed away, as Edward enthusiastically explained how the pipe had been managed and the mill saved, and what a great satisfaction it was to him to feel that he had been instrumental in keeping back the fire. To the origin of the conflagration he gave but little thought, but expressed himself as deeply affected by Nita's sad death, and the utter destruction of the town.

Mabel loved to recall the picture he made that wintry morning as he drove along over the slippery roads, urging the horses to show their best speed, that the rain might not overtake them in heavy showers. The light wheels of the old carriage rolling easily through the muddy ruts, the horses skimming swiftly over the ground, and the pleasant change from the distressing scenes they had left behind, had revived him wonderfully, and brought an exhilaration almost surprising after the miseries of the past night.

Mabel remembered how bright his face had seemed when he spoke to her of the mill. She knew his heart was full of hope; he was so ready with plans, so far-seeing, so magnanimous, that he could rise above the dark discouragements around him, and hope by patient work and unflagging zeal to restore the heavy losses that threatened now to overwhelm the camp. She thought how generous his nature was when he spoke of forgetting all the wrongs of the past, and each man striving with honest, indiscriminating charity to build up a new era of prosperity. She did not realize that her presence cheered and inspired him with all the hope he felt. But she knew that he was not forgetful of her when his eye had rested for a moment on her face, and she had caught a gleam of light from it that betokened all the tenderness that dwelt in his heart.

And so the memory of that glance had been a comfort to her all day. She was happy, besides, for Edward's sake, knowing that his bravery and presence of mind had saved the mine-works from destruction, for which due praise must be awarded to him.

All day he had been absent at Lucky Streak. Mrs. Dennett had anxiously wondered what kept him; Nellie had privately rejoiced, as much as was possible in the soured state of her feelings, that he was not around; and Mabel had tried to silence an occasional touch of jealous pain. It was her last day in the mountains, and yet the excitement at the camp had kept him from her side. *She* would not have preferred to leave him for the sake of listening to idle gossip. And then her womanly heart had straightway found an excuse for his conduct, — one not only sufficient to

Edward covered his eyes with his hand, as if thereby he might hide from his view the enormity of an obstacle that stood between him and Mabel. "I cannot look you in the face and tell you of what they have accused me," he said excitedly. "It seems to stand between us like a great barrier, — a mountain of disgrace and misery, — which I can never hope to remove." He stopped and drew in his breath quickly as if to fortify himself for the trying ordeal before him, but Mabel waited in vain for him to continue. Ah! how could he proclaim his own disgrace? How could he know that Mabel would believe his story in the face of the damaging evidence before him?

"What has changed you so, Edward?" she asked again. "What has happened? Nothing can stand between my friendship and you. Has it not been tested? and did not we promise never to distrust each other again?"

"Yes. But you do not know how impossible it may be to believe," he said, rising hurriedly and pacing up and down the room. "Mabel, they say that *I* have destroyed the town. They accuse me of getting my revenge in that way. It is all plain to them; the trouble at the mill was not settled to my satisfaction, and I, feeling that defeat was certain, resolved that neither side should win. But, Mabel, it is a falsehood. It is a base, unjust accusation. I care not what their proofs may be, it is a lie, — a foul lie!" That despairing face had altered now. Angry fires flashed from the heavy eyes, and the haggard look changed into something awful in his righteous wrath. What strong, healthy, sound-minded man ever endures injustice and

dishonor, either to himself or those whom he loves, but that a fierce spirit of indignation is aroused, which demands restitution, whether it be possible to secure it or not? It is only for woman's gentle nature to bear calumny and persecution with charity and meekness, waiting and trusting patiently that a divine, pitying providence will at last relieve her bitter sorrow.

But Edward Dennett could not bear his wrongs in silence. Could he allow his honor to be assailed, and not stand up manfully in its defence? Could he have a fiendish crime laid to his charge? Could he meet his accuser face to face, helpless to prove the wretch a black-hearted villain, and take the punishment calmly, without a protestation of his innocence?

He strode up and down the room in a wild frenzy, scarcely hearing or seeing anything but the fatal words and looks of his accusers, until Mabel touched his arm lightly and looked up pleadingly into his face. That soft touch had a magic in it, for it dispelled the strong man's anger, as the sunlight breaks the fury of the storm, and brought the rainbow of penitence in a moment. "Sit down and tell me about it," she said, kindly. "Let us think it over together. Perhaps there is a way out of the cruel position they have placed you in. O yes; there is surely some way. Some one must have seen you. Tell me the story calmly. Perhaps I can help you clear up the mistake."

"It is no mistake, Mabel," Edward said, allowing himself to be led to a chair. "It is a premeditated scheme. There can be no way out of it, for I was certainly watched, and proof manufactured to implicate

me. Why it should be done, who are guilty, and what strange complications have worked out this result, I do not know. I only believe that Knowles — Forgive me, he is your friend; but I still believe that he has done or has helped to do the deed. For he has invented the most hideous falsehood that ever was told to put the crime on me."

Then Edward gravely repeated the story of his wrongs. If ever in that painful recital of injustice the madness of resentment seized him, a glance at Mabel's pitying, gentle face brought calmer, better feelings. There is always a frantic hopelessness in the realization of being utterly forsaken by one's friends.

Edward had come prepared to feel the sting of that last bitterest blow of fate, — Mabel's doubts. His mother had been overwhelmed with sorrow. In truth, he felt that the ignominy fell heavier on her, trustful and clinging like a vine to something strong and able to resist the storms of life, than on his own brave, defiant nature. But when he found Mabel ready with just the calm tenderness which would soothe his wrath into reason and reconciliation, his heart melted almost to forgiveness. "Let me tell you something, Mabel," he said, after he had related the story Knowles had told. "If I had been less faithful to the trust imposed on me, I would not have remained up to help the watchman with his work; if, when utter defeat seemed imminent, I had not thought of you, and hope had not risen strong to crowd down my discouragements, — if faith had not somehow whispered that the straight, upright path of duty would lead to success and satisfaction, and a clear conscience in the end, — I should

not be here covered with shame and dishonor, for they would not have had the opportunity to entrap me. I cannot tell you all the mortifying miseries of the day, Mabel. They even sent some one out behind us when I drove over here with you this morning. Though they were willing to allow me my liberty, they did not want me to get away before they had tortured me to their satisfaction. There was a trial,—such as it was. Then I found out how few were the friends I had. Among my workmen, only a few of the shaft-hands had a word in my favor, except poor Logan, who worked in the mill. He came over to town for the express purpose of staying by me, and helping fight the battle. Poor fellow! It did little good except to comfort me. They even construed Nita Logan's dying call for me as evidence against me, though the poor girl could not reveal her awful secret. Would to heaven that she had, for I am sure it would be something in my favor. Mr. Sevenoakes was non-committal, but I could see his sympathies were with Knowles. After all the evidence had been collected, they asked me to disprove it. I could do nothing but state my inability, and protest my innocence. Then I was given my choice, to appear no more at Lucky Streak, or be arrested and tried by a court. I chose the latter course. This raised a breeze. I was declared ungrateful, and after some consultation among the witnesses, they insisted it would be a trying ordeal for them all to go through. Small wonder that the ordeal would be trying, when they would thereby necessarily run the risk of betraying their own guilt! Then they concluded to *make* me go; and when I refused to promise this, I was told that measures would be taken to compel me.

"Ah, Mabel! those were terrible moments! Forgive me when I confess that indignation and contemptuous anger got the better of my reason for a time. I hurt my own cause by my persistent refusal to listen to their insults. Though now, when I am here with you, and look back upon it as something more bitter than death, yet feeling that it is all past forever, I regret I did not show more humility and charity, such as your kind sympathy prompts. But, Mabel, you do not think me guilty of that crime? If I felt myself unworthy of your friendship, I should not be here to bid you good by."

"My friend," Mabel said, trying to conceal how dewy and bright her eyes had grown, "I am sure you are not. Tell me what to do; let me help you some way," she added quickly, fearing to express the fond solicitude she felt.

"Unless the disgrace which now covers me is removed, you can never do anything more for me. I can only keep the remembrance of your kindness at this time. I will not ask you to accept a friend whose name is blackened and despised. I will not allow you to do it. But, Mabel, my faith is strong that some time my innocence will be established; that some time I can offer you my hand with a past untarnished by anything, even by the breath of slander. I am powerless to bring about that day myself. I can only wait, and hope that Providence will work out my deliverance. And until then I must be an outcast from my home and friends. But I shall go out conscious of having lived an honest life, Mabel. Whether that reward will compensate me for all the misery I have suffered for it,

I cannot tell. When all else is gone, it is at best but a poor inheritance, — the satisfaction of not doubting one's own self when condemned by hundreds who have known him from his youth. And so I realize that I have lived to little purpose. And yet I would not exchange the feeling of satisfaction that comes from knowing that one so true-hearted and gentle as you can still believe in me, for the adulation of all the world. That is my blessing. I shall go out, cherishing it as one of the few sweet, unimbittered memories of the past." He rose, and held out his hand to Mabel, ready to say farewell. The sun had crossed the narrow strip of clear sky, and had withdrawn behind the purple clouds again, while the shadow fell on the grave, sad face of him who was leaving love, home, friends, and life itself almost, behind.

"Mabel," he said slowly, "let me thank you for the glimpse of heaven you have opened to my eyes. I dare not try to say more, even though my farewells to all the other joys that are left me require few words indeed. Fate cannot rob me of the remembrance of you. I may never see you again, and yet your influence — your presence — will always be with me, and I shall be better for it. Your image will rise before me in long days of exile, a solace, a guide to that better place where we may meet at last, without the sting of earthly pain."

Tears were falling from Mabel's eyes, — great innocent tears she could not suppress. How could she let him go out into the cruel world alone? There is usually something very childlike in a young girl's love. It is quick to yield its sympathy, and yet though it acts as

the stay and comforter of the strong man in his hours of need, it is helpless and weak without that object which it sometimes supports alone.

"You must not go to-night, Edward," she said, appealingly. "To-morrow morning you will start with renewed courage after your night's rest. And who knows but that some one will be over from town to tell you that you need not go, — that your innocence is proved."

"They would more likely be over to inflict a punishment on me for not obeying their orders," Edward answered, looking lovingly down upon the slender form beside him. "No, Mabel; I must go to-night. I can never endure that bitterness again. We must part, — with hope let it be, instead of despair. Your love must sustain me, Mabel, in this last hour. Heaven knows there is little enough left to keep me from utter desperation when I go out from your kind pity."

There is sometimes a supernatural power bestowed upon women's hearts, when they, forgetting their own needs, can yield comfort and courage to the broken spirits of those infinitely stronger to bear the brunt of life's battles. Mabel found that strength, and heedless of her own pain, poured out all the sweetness, the essence, of her soul, not in lamentings, but in consolation and hopeful counsels.

And so as the hour passed, Edward and Mabel sat together while the wintry gloaming gathered, forgetful of the trials and sorrows of their way; and heedless of the gloom and cruelties of the great wide world around them, looked forward into a future far beyond the coarse discords and petty bickerings of this life, where

heaven unfolds its unspeakable glories, its divine and tender raptures, and with hands clasped, saw through the coming years when that time would be theirs, and said together, "We can wait."

And sad as was their parting, still in both hearts there reigned supreme a calm comfort, a nameless hope, that made their lot endurable.

Evening was darkening fast around them when all the last sad duties and farewells were over, and Mabel stood in the vine-covered porch to watch the proud man, to whom she would gladly have given all her life, shake off the bonds of hope and brave the harrowings of fate in that lonely exile which lay before him.

But Edward, dependent as he was upon that gentle girl, still had strength to refuse the sacrifice she was willing to make, and bear his part alone.

A gentle rain was falling when he led his horse to the door, and Mabel stepped out into the twinkling drops for one last hand-clasp ere he rode away. Perhaps it was the last time they would ever meet on earth. Ah! how could either have endured that moment had they not looked beyond the gloom into that celestial country, whither faith and hope would lead their footsteps on, and bright waters of recompense and healing would wash away their griefs!

There was a power which upheld that saddened man as he went away, and turning his face from the bleak, stormy road before him, strained his eyes for a last glimpse of that home that lay behind him, where all the treasures of his heart were left, for a last glimpse of that lonely form in the doorway, outlined dark against the pale lights of the early evening flashing

with a warmth and brightness not all their own through the storm-sprays and the woods.

He could not comprehend how he endured it; he only felt that a thrill of strength come over him when from the last hilltop he looked back, knowing that the next step would hide all love and brightness from his way, that as he went on a strange consolation and the genial warmth of a new-found hope came over him, which supplied his empty, sorrowing heart with something of the inspiration he had left behind.

And Mabel, though possessed of finer intuition, knew not what that power was which so sustained her. She only knew that, despite the quick beating of her heart and the dewy tears that gathered in her eyes, she could still look out upon the hilly, winding road, and watch the lonely horseman wend his way along the cañon and across the shadowy vales, till night and rain mist hid him from her sight.

The morning broke dark and rainy. Clear, shallow drops clung to the window-panes, and slanting sheets of rain descended in steady showers to obscure the view beyond, misty itself with overhanging clouds and low, dim vapors. Mrs. Dennett's home was very cheerful and pleasant that morning. The guests were greeted with savory scents of coffee as soon as they left their chambers, and a bright, warm fire blazed in the sitting-room, where Mrs. Dennett waited to welcome them, stately in a dark brown morning-wrapper, her grayish golden hair waving back from a face that was full of kindness and hospitality, though touched by new lines of sadness.

They breakfasted in the long, low dining-room with its crimson carpet, its heavy curtained windows, and walls tinted by the rosy, warm reflection from the floor, which had seemed so beautiful and homelike to Mabel on her first visit to Edward's home.

Mrs. Dennett clung to Mabel as a solace in her affliction. She longed for the comfort and the brightness this sweet young girl could bring into her twice desolate home, and dreaded the hour when this last ray of sunshine should fade out of her life. But she put the thought aside. It was not for her now to indulge in hopes like these; and Mabel also secretly longed to remain with Mrs. Dennett, that she might bury her own sorrow with a less bitter heartache for the kindness showered around her by true motherly sympathy. As the morning brightened into full daylight the rain ceased, and the dripping woods held up their drenched and almost leafless branches to the gray sky with a new beauty, while the far-off hills, misty with the storms about them, regained their vanished blueness, and stood out behind the pearly fogs like lines of giant soldiers battling with the beating rain.

In Mrs. Dennett's small, elegant sitting-room the guests gathered after breakfast, while their sad-faced hostess, hiding her own inexpressible sorrow, busied herself in making little preparations for their journey. Many were Mrs. Willis's anxious glances from the rain-spattered windows for signs of good weather on their prospective journey, and many the injunctions to the girls not to fail of being ready when the time came to start. The conversation was chiefly confined to conjectures about the state of the mud in the roads,

the possibility of getting the driver to wait at Robinson's wayside house an extra half-hour until his passengers were comfortably warmed, on the part of Mrs. Willis; and thoughtful directions and suggestions about the journey, and careful solicitude as to the provision of wraps, on the part of Mrs. Dennett. A great rumble and the splash of slippery feet, a jocose laugh and a loud "Hello," announced the heavy stage, adding a bit of welcome color to the dull gray landscape, with its red paint newly brightened by the washing rain.

While the others, rustling in their shiny rain-cloaks, hastened out behind the driver, carrying their bundles and bags, Mabel lingered for a quiet farewell to the old garden where Edward had played and worked in his boyhood, where she had seen him fire his signal-gun one bright spring day, when its shrubs and vines were bending with luxuriant bloom.

Frosts and storms had stripped it now, and only frail, belated blossoms, beaten and broken by the storm, clung patiently to nodding stalks, and held up their delicate colors to the frowning skies. A fine spray dewed the rose leaves by the path, and glistened brilliantly in cold, clear drops like shattered diamonds on the thorny, naked twigs of the sighing trees. Mabel glanced backward toward the pleasant porch, where on her first visit to this charming home she had seen Mrs. Dennett sewing contentedly behind the fragrant vines. She remembered that first bright smile with which Mrs. Dennett had welcomed her. She remembered now that the loving greeting, the dawning light in those soft blue eyes, had never been wanting. There she stood out at the gate now, waiting for her last guest

with an expression as full of slumbering charity as Edward's, wholly as uneffaced by the bitterness of years.

She held out her hand without a word, while Mabel took it silently, and turned to go. But something held her back. Here she too had suffered; this home which had been Edward's was dearer to her than any other spot on earth; that sweet-faced lady beside her was his mother. Could she go and leave it all,—perhaps forever,—without one word of parting, one sign of affection, when her heart was brimming over? No; she must speak; she turned back, and placing both arms around Mrs. Dennett's neck, kissed her fondly on the cheek. "I could not go without telling you something of the love I feel for you, Mrs. Dennett," she said, earnestly. "Aside from all the gratitude I owe for your kindness, there is something else,—I love you because you are—"

"I know, I know," answered Mrs. Dennett, quickly. "*He* has told me, dear. But I could not speak to you on such a subject, for I realize our disgraced position; I could not presume, you know, my child."

"Do not say that," Mabel said, sadly. "You are not disgraced in my eyes. To me Edward is even more manly and noble than at first; for he has the courage to bear injustice without harboring malice toward those who have inflicted it. Oh, you do not know all! I cannot tell you now!" she added, breathlessly. "But tell him for me just this little message,—that Providence is good; it will guide us both to the place we have hoped to reach. And when at last he reaches home, my love will be waiting for him there."

Mrs. Dennett silently folded the young girl in her arms and kissed her, and then they parted.

Mabel was not conscious that the fires in the black eyes of the expressman beside the driver were not extinguishable by rain; or that there were many sly allusions to rosy cheeks and pretty girls who were so proud that a whole summer did not suffice to make their acquaintance. She sat quietly looking on the scenes around her, watching for the last glimpse of Edward's rose-embowered home among the mountains, thinking what a new charm all those wild hills had assumed since she first saw them, and feeling that nevermore would she breathe the sweet aroma of the boundless pine-lands, or catch a gleam of far-off, snowy summits, without a new stirring of that suffocating pain,—that sad, sweet joy which had taken possession of her life.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MEMORIES OF THE SAN JOAQUIN.

As on through marshy banks a silent river
Winds tortuously, with moonbeams all a-quiver,
So crowded memories haste, with magic power,
To soothe the sorrows of the dying hour.

*Selected.*

LOCUSTVILLE seemed hardly like itself after Lois was gone. Many a friend missed her, regretfully remembering how her bright face and willing hands had helped to smooth rough places for them, though they scarcely realized it at the time. Mrs. Mills grew anxious, and even forgot to gossip while telling of her troubles, and how she would certainly have to send for Lois if she did not return when the two weeks were up. And the little folks were almost inconsolable, since they could no longer save their brightest pinks and their rosiest apples to carry to Miss Warren, that they might see how happy it seemed to make her, and thus show their gratitude for her watchful, patient care, and her loving sympathy in their little troubles which others scarcely deemed to be worthy of the name. All through the warm vacation the little troops of bright, happy children were seen coming and going through that friendly looking old front gate at Mrs. Mills's house, and Lois had found their simple manifestations of good-will the brightest things in her life, except the visits of the good, faithful Doctor. He had a power to

make the most serious obstacle seem small in comparison to his protecting strength. His unerring judgment, his hearty generosity, his kindly interest, made him, indeed, her most trusted, most respected friend.

And the Doctor himself! No one of all the friends who missed the school-mistress found life so burdensome without her as did he who loved her so incomparably better than they all. To others she was helpful and pleasant and kind, — instrumental in giving them happiness; to him she was the great essential, without whom life was dull and colorless and blank. On her depended what little joy and purpose the world could thereafter yield to him, for the years that had brought the silvery threads to his once brown hair had brought bitternesses and disappointments which had robbed life of those hearty, trustful enjoyments that ever sweeten and build up the hopes of youth. Though his dream of love had faded, — the dream that comes in life's meridian gathering round it all the scattered sunbeams of the wasted morning in one great final effort, — though the rich summer of his life had failed to keep its promise like the glorious foreshadowings of its vanished spring-time, still a calm, autumnal beauty lay before, a season when all the bloom and brightness of the world had faded; and yet its naked trees, its brown and leaf-strewn hills, were softened and half hidden by the dim, slow-drifting haze that covered with a restful tenderness all the blank desolation of the hastening winter. The bloom and the verdure were gone, but the soothing calm of this Indian-summer time would rob the coming decay of the sharp agony of despair, and mercifully hide with its smoky haze that river of his

hopes, once so full and deep and clear, but now diminished and narrow, though crystal and unsullied still, till it only shone in bright, surprising sweeps of silver breaking through the veiling mists.

Lois was not his now to care for and to love; but she was his to remember tenderly, to watch over, if not to protect. And so the world lost more than half its brightness that day when Mr. Mills drove over to Tenayee with Lois by his side. The Doctor, who went over behind them in his little cart, saw her enter the train with her usual light step, as if she was cheerful and happy as ever, but when her face appeared at the window, it was pale and sad and full of regret, and his heart was stricken with sympathy and a longing to lighten her sorrow. There seemed a mournfulness in the farewell she waived to Mr. Mills, a striving to be her old self, cheerful and bright with hope, that touched him with unutterable pity, for her act lacked the spirit she strove to put into it, and only seemed the sadder for the effort. The Doctor turned away with troubled thoughts. How could he lighten the burden that had fallen so suddenly and mysteriously upon his friend? That she was unhappy, that the stranger in the hospital had awakened in her painful memories and regrets, he was certain. But what course could he take to serve her, if ever so slightly, in this time of need? First, he thought if he could only learn the cause, he might the better be able to effect relief, if the wound he could not cure. There are some troubles in which silence is the most welcome sympathy, and so the Doctor had felt restrained from inquiring of Lois this evil which he so longed to remedy or relieve.

But now that she was gone, and nothing could give her further pain in what transpired, he resolved to learn the secret from the stranger. It was no prying curiosity that prompted this desire; but a wish to be a shield, or a helper, or a sharer in her affliction, if he could not be more.

The man at the hospital suffered intensely at times, not alone from his burns, but from exposure and exhaustion, which induced a fever, and made his chances for recovery slight. The Doctor was anxiously watchful of his patient, feeling, with a strange sensation of comfort in his heart, that thereby he might be performing a service for Lois, or at least doing as she would have him do, even to one who had caused her suffering and pain. But the days wore on, and still he found no opportunity to inquire into the subject which weighed so heavily on his mind, although he often sat and talked with the sick man when the latter wanted company, amusing him with a cheerful bit of conversation, or listening to his entertaining stories of past experiences. George never spoke of the origin of his burns, or made any reference to his acquaintance with Lois, though his talk was free enough, as if he did not intentionally conceal anything; and he swam so smoothly through both deeps and shallows of his conversation, with such a charming indifference to them, and such a graceful avoidance of all reefs, that his listener was not aware there was anything but the most thoughtless navigation through the current of his stories.

But one day when the Doctor was making a visit to George's room, he sat down by the bedside for a few minutes to rest before leaving the hospital, since he

had finished his rounds through the silent wards for that day. George lay in a dull stupor, breathing heavily for a time, and then with a long sigh he roused himself, turning over impatiently, and showing his white, disfigured face, lighted with its luminous, dark, searching eyes.

"I'm a pretty sick man, am I not, Doctor?" he said, brightening, and displaying something of his old careless grace.

"Yes," returned the Doctor kindly; "you have borne a good deal of pain; but let us trust you will come out as strong as ever."

He sighed and lay quiet for a time, as if studying the Doctor's face. Then a dreamy look came into his eyes, softening the wild, unsteady light that burned there. He was thinking, lost in memories, perhaps touched with remorse, so the Doctor did not disturb his thoughts.

"It 's wonderful," he broke out at last, as if recklessly eager to unburden his mind,—"wonderful how the world turns round. I was just thinking how strange it is for me to be back here in Tenayee,—dying in the old hospital that never had any terrors for me when I used to look so carelessly on these old brick walls, without even a thought of what was inside of them. I lived here once, but I never expected to come back again. The old place quite lost its charm for me before I left. By the way, tell me something about that Miss Warren, who came in here one day with you, and was taken so suddenly ill. She has turned nun or angel, I suppose, of late years. She used to have a sprinkling of both in her character when I knew her; but of course they

must have increased since then, in view of the circumstances."

The Doctor was thoroughly roused, and relieved besides, since George had chosen to talk of Lois, and had saved him the unpleasant task of opening the subject which was uppermost in his mind, and which troubled him sorely.

"If you knew Miss Warren once, I should say there is not much to tell. No description could do her justice, she is so thoroughly good and delightful."

"O, then she *has* turned angel," said George. "She was n't quite all that when I knew her, and yet she was a very nice little girl. I thought a good deal of her once myself."

"Ah! then you can tell *me* something about her. The memory of her must certainly be pleasant," said the Doctor, anxiously.

"O yes, I don't mind recalling the part Lois took in the little story of my sojourn here. She was younger in those days, — I dare say much more charming than she is now. Girls bordering on old-maidhood sometimes grow a trifle sour. Still, I don't know how it is with Lois. I wish she cared something for me now, for then I would have a capital nurse, at any rate; but of course it is not to be expected, when our little affair came to such an ignominious end, — no tragic parting, no sentimental promises of eternal friendship or remembrance, or such nonsense in it, — just a final, complete breaking off. She has mourned me as dead, and planted my imaginary grave with forget-me-nots all these years, I suppose. But it could n't be helped. It was better to let her think that than to tell her the

truth and have her lose her high estimate of me. A boyish prank would have turned me into a scoundrel in her eyes, and so I concluded that if it was not prudent for me to continue our acquaintance she had better think well of me than ill.

"There is something rather pleasant in recalling our first meeting. It was some years ago, and not in this place either. Left an orphan early in life, I went to live in my uncle's family, where I was obliged to remain and donate my services gratuitously for my maintenance until twenty-one. I received a little instruction in chemistry in my uncle's drug-store, but when I attained my majority I left in disgust, feeling that the world would do more for me than my uncle, when I should at last reach his standard of usefulness. I drifted around for a year or two, saving a little to use when I should have an opportunity to finish my education in chemistry, until at last I obtained a position as freight agent at a little wharf on the San Joaquin.

"It was a lonely life I led there, and a hard one too. I had a little house on the river margin, in which I employed my spare time, fitting it up comfortably, and storing it with books for companions when nothing better offered. Twenty times a day some little tug would come steaming up the river, towing a great old awkward barge, a sloop, or a schooner, with their inevitable signals for me to be ready to receive some keg of molasses, or box of crackers or soap, and load them with my charge of potatoes, or salt beef, or tule-rushes. They had me up at all hours of the night, attending to the infernal little batches of freight that came in piecemeal, so that my strongest recollection now of the

lonely river wharf is of the night scene when the signal-light shone like a glowing white star high up above the restless, dark waters, and of the lanterns lighting up up the rough gable-end of the freight-house, in the door of which my key grated so aggravating often, and where the columns of my open entry-book continually lengthened. Twice a week the steamers stopped to exchange mail or passengers, and then I got a glimpse of civilization, for the people from the surrounding districts, for whom I had to do all this drudgery, came flocking around, often accompanied by their women-folks, anxious for their letters, expecting friends, or ready for a journey themselves; so that I always looked forward to the steamer-day with a glow of satisfaction. As for company, I didn't have any, except the 'Dutch boys,' who lived in a cabin up the river, where they caught suckers. They sometimes came down to enliven me with a tune on their accordion, which served to attract a few loungers to the spot, and then I usually put in a pretty good day or evening, with cigars, and plenty of help when the boats came.

"But one night I was all alone, sitting rather disconsolately out on the edge of the wharf, swinging my legs over the water, and looking absently up the broad river shut in by its dark, low banks fringed with nodding tules. It was a pleasant sort of evening, I remember, warm and balmy, with just a soft breeze stirring gently in the rushes, and skimming with an added freshness down the wide, level expanse of water. The great marshy tule-grown valley stretched out for miles each side of the curving stream, but all was hidden in the darkness, except the pale lights here and

there on the surface of the river, showing its tortuous course between the inky black shores. I was thinking even in the midst of my solitude that there was a spice fascination in that kind of life, if only something might come along to enliven it once in a while, and make it somewhat pleasant, when the dull buzz and quick, short puffing of the hopelessly frequent tug came across the winding river, and in a minute the familiar sight of the dark floating object, with its short, thick smoke-stack scattering trails of fiery sparks and black wreaths of soot against the sky, presented itself. It made no end of noise, this particular steam affair, so that it was not until its snorting and puffing hushed itself into a low, steady hiss when it turned off steam that I heard voices singing, uncommonly sweet and clear, behind it.

"As the tug drew up to the wharf, I saw that it had in tow, not the usual barge, but a small pleasure-craft, filled almost to the capsizing point with pretty young girls and attentive young men, and one or two 'elderlies' to keep things straight. They were on a little excursion up the river, undecided where they would stop to wait for the late moon-rise before going back. When the tug stopped, an idea seized some one in the pleasure-boat, and the proposition was made that they part company with the tug and explore the wharf, without going farther. You can readily imagine that my consent was easily obtained, and I was so agitated and eager to receive the boat-load of beauty in proper style that my duty toward the tug-boat's freight almost slipped my mind; at any rate, if my idea of duty did not become slippery, my hands or the greasy soft-soap

keg did, for the thing escaped my hold, and with a resounding boom and a heavy splash it dropped down beside the timbers of the wharf, and sank into the rocking, spumy waters below. There was some explosive swearing and premonitions of a storm between the tug's crew and myself, but I avoided trouble by paying for the loss, and let the tug go on her way up the river, ploughing inky-black furrows tipped with edges of foam in the water, and showing her course miles away up the broad, winding stream by the dull red glow and the storm of flying sparks from her smoke-stack.

"Ashamed as I was of my exhibition of awkwardness, regretful as I was of my loss, the thing almost vanished from my mind, and I was glad of its occurrence before my visitors left the wharf. First of the girls who came out of the boat was a trim, bright little lady in a dark blue boating-dress, pretty and smiling as a picture, helped tenderly by a very attentive ancient beau who seemed to worship her, while I stood by and held the lantern. Capital idea that was, for I sized them all up as they came along the plank. But I was smitten with the first girl. I almost fell in love with her before she reached the wharf,—with her foot, perhaps, more properly speaking. It was small and neat and shapely, with the daintiest little ankle imaginable, and she put it out timidly at first, and then drew back before stepping from the plank, but at last gaining courage, planted it firmly on the wharf,—all of which gave me a first-class opportunity to get a look at it. She had a friend,—this charming maiden with the pretty foot,—and the friend was a sly girl, slender and

willowy and red-haired, with a fine white face and an exasperatingly cool habit of exacting her own way,—and getting it too. These two were the life of the party. Miss Nellie Minton,—by the way, I met her last spring on a ferry-boat in the upper country, wholly unchanged, and the circumstance recalled vividly that night of our first meeting on the river wharf; but as I was going to say, Miss Minton set herself up for queen of the crowd, which claim was readily recognized by Miss Lois Warren, the youthful school-ma'am teaching her first school at Locustville, and out with this party of friends to spend a week or so of her vacation at some little town on the river. But the gentlemanly side of the company worshipped the maid of honor to the queen more than the potentate herself,—and I for once sided with the masculine portion of the community in their way of thinking. It happened that I had had a previous slight acquaintance with one of the gentlemen in the boat, so introductions followed, and all restraint wore off in the ensuing good feeling.

"Fortunately the 'Dutch boys' took it into their heads to come down to the wharf that evening, and we heard the faint strains of their accordion falling sweetly on the night air while they were still away off, following the narrow, winding trail that led through the tall, damp tule-rushes. But the spirit of the music was sufficient to arouse every one, and when the 'Dutch boys' arrived, they were astonished to find us whirling lightly up and down the firm boards of the wharf to the time of the quick, sweet waltz they were playing.

"Perhaps our case would not have been so serious as it afterward proved to be had it not been for something

the merry little school-m'am did. I cut out all admirers, and secured the second dance with her, and after it, while walking up and down the wharf, — we had no seats, except a dozen sacks of potatoes awaiting shipment, and these were already occupied as such, much to the prejudice of the tubers, — she expressed herself so sweetly sympathetic for my accident with the soap-barrel that I felt at once I had never seen before such an exquisitely fine, sensitive nature as hers, and consequently I tumbled straight as the soap-keg, — not into the river, but into love.

"I was wrought up to the wildest pitch. Excusing myself, I went into my little house and tore out a month's supply of delicacies, made coffee and chocolate, spread the table, the length of which I helped out wonderfully with boards, and when the moon was rising up out of the endless plain of tule-marsh that stretched out both sides through the great San Joaquin Valley, I invited my guests in for refreshments. It was the crowning success of the evening. I was the jolliest best fellow on the river, they all said, and I — well I was younger then, and I enjoyed it hugely. As host, I could take my pick of the girls, — having none myself, — and of course I chose Lois, enlisting the help of Nellie Minton in my behalf.

"I sat beside Lois at table, the elderly admirer on one side mildly submitting to my appropriation of his pretty girl as a matter of course; for most assuredly an old fellow, prosy and slow and dry, could n't stand alongside of *me* in such a conquest, when the fire of my young blood was up and I was bent on victory. It was not to be thought of, because of course Lois was predis-

posed in favor of young fellows. An old man would n't do for her, even if she was a smart little school-ma'am with plenty of practical ideas."

The Doctor mentally flinched. George's words struck him like a blow, though to be sure he had come to a similar conclusion himself. He turned very red, and nervously drew out his yellow gloves, — those dear old half-soiled gloves, with Lois's own neat little stitches in the fingers. The sight of them soothed him wonderfully after this fresh wound his sore heart had received, and unconsciously he clasped them with a loving pressure to his great manly breast while George continued with his story.

"When I begged that she would do the honors of the feast by pouring out the coffee and dishing up the preserves, she complied with a readiness the sweetest possible, and added the one wanting touch to make our night revel as refined and romantic as it was merry and gleeful. She sat with such lady-like composure, yet such a charming air of proprietorship, and dished up the viands, smiling and joining lightly in the conversation as she passed the cups around, her blue eyes bright with animation, and her fair face visited every second by a host of freakish dimples! By Jove! as I sat there and watched her behind the big, steaming coffee-pot, and received such gentle, kind acknowledgment to every attention I bestowed, I made up my mind then and there to have a little table of my own some day, presided over by this same charming, fair-faced little school-ma'am. The idea may be laughable now, but I was young then. I presume you know how it is yourself, Doctor. Quite likely you had just such

thoughts when you were a young man with fresh feelings and hopes."

The Doctor turned to adjust the shade at the window, thinking sorrowfully all the while of his own dead, faded dream of love. He was not ashamed because it had come when he was no longer youthful and full of strong, young hope; and yet the story that George was telling so carelessly for his amusement was growing strangely painful by coming irreverently and harshly close to his own cherished secret.

"O no; it was not strange that you should have had such a hope," he replied absently, revolving in his mind the thought that other men had cherished just such dreams and hopes of Lois as he, and vaguely wondering — perhaps a little impatiently — if these dreams had held for others such a sacred loveliness as for him.

"Well, I suppose none of us will ever forget that night," continued George, warming up to his story again. "At any rate, two of us will not, — Lois and myself. It was one of those rare seasons of life when all care and responsibility seem to vanish, and the hour is one of unalloyed, childlike enjoyment, with a full capacity of appreciation. Lois told me afterward that it was one of the very happiest she had ever known. Well, well; Lois was a thoroughly good little girl, after all. Somehow it rather stirs me up to recall that night, even yet.

"The prettiest picture in all my recollection of Lois, except perhaps the time when she came up the plank and showed her neat little foot, was the parting one that night when the moon had risen high into the sky, flooding with light the level, swampy valley, and converting

the dark, restless river into a smooth, broad, glorious stream of silver.

"She stood on the edge of the wharf, surrounded by the picturesque mystery of the moonlit plain beyond the dark farther shore, her trim, shapely figure outlined against the water, and the cool breeze that had sprung up playing listlessly with the little brown curls around her face. The boys in the boat below, who were getting it ready for embarkation, just then struck up the sweet, haunting music of their boat-song. A silence fell over the waiting groups as the deep, rich voices rose above the ripple of the waters washing against the piles of the wharf, and Lois stood quiet, her face turned toward the silvery expanse of water in a dreamy reverie, and the moonlight showering down around her, touching her fair, round cheek, and lighting up her face with a strange new beauty."

The Doctor turned away again, but not with a painful thought. Had he not seen Lois in one of those same sweet musings that day, when, as he was driving away from the little red school-house, he turned and saw her standing under the locust-trees, looking dreamily out toward the blue line of far-off hills? He had sometimes wondered if Lois seemed so gentle and lovely to others as she looked to him, when lost in those fanciful thoughts. He had his answer now. It was not a product of the loving esteem in which he held her, for others had seen her thus, and had felt the delightful spell that he had known. It was indeed a reality.

"I always like to think of Lois as she looked then," George went on. "I have a little picture of both herself and her character in the thought; for when the

song died away and she turned toward me, I naturally supposed that she would come out of that sentimental reverie, her eyes heavy with tears. But no: her face was cheerful and bright as ever, and her voice musical in its steadiness, when she held out her hand, saying cordially, 'My hand for good night, and the many thanks which I cannot express.' 'But not good by, I hope,' said I, appealingly. 'May I not see you again?' She hesitated a moment, and then I asked permission to call upon her, which she granted.

"I waited that night out on the deserted wharf until the song of the boat's crew, faint and far, was hushed in the splash and gurgle far down the river, thinking, with a pleasure indescribable, of this happy diversion from my usual lonely life.

"But that was about the last of my solitude. I soon left the wharf, and came here,—to be near Lois, and to study chemistry. In a few months we were engaged, and you can imagine my trips over to Locustville became pretty frequent, and my circle of acquaintances there correspondingly large. Confound it all! I might have escaped this miserable doom if I had stayed here and learned of Lois how to be better. She had a wonderful influence over me for good. But fate denied me just at the time when I was most happy in my infatuation for her, and was enjoying hugely my escapes from the snares set by a handsome, black-eyed widow over here in Tenayee, whom nobody knew anything about.

"But to make a clean breast of it, I got into difficulties which forced me to move out of town for good. I was friendly with a set of medical students who some-

times got up rides about the place; and since I kept a horse,—principally to ride over to Louisville four or five times a week,—I often joined them. A lot of us kept our horses in the pasture of a little old man who was half crazy, always drunk, and nigher than a mad dog. We had a quarrel with him every time we wanted our horses, and as my visits were most frequent, I consequently had more trouble with him than the others. He accused us of breaking his fences, and riding over his garden-patch, in language that was more than strong; and so one night we boys got pretty well fired up, and determined to have the fun of doing a little of the mischief he accused us of perpetrating. I got some poison from the chemicals I worked with, and in a body we set out to the old man's barn, where he kept a snarling bull-dog ready to be turned loose on us when the old wretch's whim dictated. We were intending to feast this precious animal on a piece of meat thickly buttered with strychnine, but the vile thing made a disturbance, and we just escaped out-and-out detection by beating a rapid retreat. In my hurry I dropped the bottle of poison on the hay, with the cork out, and of course the stuff was spilled, and so after that the old fellow's chickens mysteriously died off in great numbers, and a valuable cow passed in her checks for the great unknown. It was an unfortunate piece of business, but doubly so for me; for when the bottle was found, it bore the label of the drug-store where I pursued by studies, and also private marks in my handwriting, and so of course suspicion pointed directly to me as the agent of the wrong. I had been on the worst possible terms with the old man, and

hence I must have maliciously poisoned his hay for revenge. I had plenty of friends in the place who were willing to stick to me, but I was only interested in keeping the matter from a public airing. I knew if I were even accused of such a thing it would break Lois's heart and destroy our happiness. She would know — for she was not a love-blind maiden — that I had had something to do with the controversy in a remote sort of way, since I had once or twice related my quarrels with the old man, and she had steadily advised me to find another pasture for my horse. But the thing could n't be helped. I had to keep it quiet or lose Lois, for she could never accept me if a suspicion rested on my name, nor endure the ugly process of the court to establish my innocence. If I had had money, the trouble would have vanished immediately, but I was poor, and did n't dare to borrow; so I had to bear the consequences of my foolish prank.

"Finally the old man sent me word that if I did n't leave town in a week he would prosecute me. I think he was afraid of me, and preferred the freedom from my company in town to my punishment. He was universally disliked, and I probably should have got clear if he had carried out his threats; but if I had to lose Lois, I preferred doing it in the way most agreeable to myself; and so, since I had a good offer to go to the mines, I determined to take it and cut loose from the old ties forever.

"Nellie Minton was in Locustville on a second visit just then, and hence I availed myself of my old ally in this extremity. There had been a certain sympathy between us from the first. She had been Lois's friend,

and had divulged little secrets to me, and helped me along somewhat in my suit, for which I assure you she lost nothing.

"The scheming minx had heard a rumor of the difficulty from a special source of gossip, or I should have been very clear of giving *her* an inkling of it; but since she already knew something, the best way to stop her prying was to tell her enough to satisfy her notion of the thing. So I told her the danger I was in, and got her to arrange my departure. I was hurriedly called away, she was to say, but I was to return in a few days. This I was supposed to have told her at an accidental meeting as I was leaving town. She had friends in the place whither I was bound, and hence that fact would establish a subsequent source of news from me through her. She was to give my farewell to Lois, and assure the devoted girl of my inability to see her before I went, and that I would call immediately after my return and explain the lucky business venture that called me away. I wrote her a short note also, but to avoid suspicion I had to abridge it greatly, and trust the most lengthy explanations to Nellie.

"Of course, by a fortnight conjectures were exhausted about the delay in my return, and even the most incredulous believed that something of a serious nature had detained me. A letter from Nellie, from the city where she had sent it to be posted, informed me that Lois was nearly frantic with anxiety, and regardless of appearances intended to start herself or send a messenger to the place whither I was supposed to have gone. She never for a moment doubted that I was in need of her help, and that insurmountable obstacles

forced my silence. Poor Lois! She was so trustful and loving, I was sorry to give her pain.

"So then I had to make the final stroke and close my career for good, and thus prevent Lois's intention of rendering aid in the unknown trouble that detained me. The news came indirectly through Nellie's friends that I had been drowned in the San Joaquin immediately on my arrival at that town. At first I had mysteriously disappeared, and then, after several days, the body of an unknown man had been found in the river, — it quite often happens that such is the case, — but it was so far decomposed as to prevent recognition, although from the size it might possibly have been mine. Of course all of the rumors from Nellie's friends were fabrications, except the finding of the dead stranger; but it had to be fixed up that way in order to make the thing more certain, for if there was much of a doubt Lois would be sure to investigate. The body was buried, and since the place where I was supposed to have met my untimely end was a long distance from Tenayee, of course no one had a chance to inquire into the facts at all; and when, afterward, Lois went to find my supposed last resting-place, with a little sum that she had saved to erect a stone and fix it up a bit, no one could point out the exact spot where the stranger was buried, — nor tell her anything of the alleged rumors, either, I 'll warrant. But of course the trustful girl was satisfied with what she knew, for she felt certain that I would have come to her if in the land of the living.

"Poor Lois! I trust she enjoyed herself hugely spending the money on ribbons and such things. And that was the end of our little romance.

"As for me, I went off to the mines and becoming interested in ores, I have traveled about extensively since then all over the coast, being reasonably successful as an assayer. It was not long before the new life swallowed up the old, and I soon found comfort for what I supposed to be my broken heart. That being my first serious affair, of course I did not understand how soon one can be comforted with a second. I have had several since, one desperately earnest which turned out miserably for me, and far more so for the other fellow in the game, *as I happen to know.*"

His eyes, that had gazed so calmly on the Doctor's quiet face, grew dark and wild and unsteady with his last words, as if his mind, grown weak with suffering, was roused to painful madness by these memories.

The Doctor tried to calm him, and lead his thoughts back to Lois, and the restful sweetness associated with her. Rising to go, and arranging in his usual hurried way his medicine-case, he said, "Have you never heard from your friends here since you left?"

George sank back on his pillow with a sigh, showing his relief that he had not betrayed himself by venturing farther on dangerous ground. He closed his eyes as if soothed by the older, sweeter memories of Lois and his first youthful love, and as if willing to repose in its comforting tranquillity.

"O yes," he said, in answer to the Doctor's question; "indirectly I have heard, several times. But the events in which I figured have faded out most completely by this time, I presume; and yet to me, coming to this town and reviving again its slumbering memories, the past rises up before me as if it were but yesterday that

I walked the streets of Locustville; and I can see as plainly as if they lay before me all those old, dead scenes of my life,—the rolling hills, treeless and stubble-grown, the quaint green gardens, and the blossoming, feathery-leaved trees that lined the shady streets, the white, winding roads, and even those first pictures of the night-time on the river at the little wharf, robbed now of everything wearisome and lonely, and surrounded by a vague, sweet charm, new yet full of all its ancient magic, like the returning, faint, far echoes of some long-forgotten melody."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### LOIS AT HOME.

I have forgotten all the love you gave me.
And all the tender words you ever said.
I have unbound the chains that did enslave me,
And sealed the tears they cost me with the dead.
Thou wert a god in an enchanted heaven
Wherein I dwelt for one bright summer day;
But now thou art forgotten,—and forgiven;
For thou were not to blame for being clay.

*Selected.*

Strange phantoms rising as the mists arise.

Poet.

Out where the woodland steeped the pure, clear mountain air with the sweet aroma of the pine, Lois spent many hours of the cool, bright days that followed her return home, looking with a new interest on the landscape that held so much of grandeur and tender beauty for her eyes. All her cherished memories of those majestic scenes lost their charm when compared to the reality, she felt; and yet there was something lacking, — something she had expected to find in her native hills which she still missed. She loved to be alone in those days. There was a dreamy charm in wandering through the still pine woods, with no other companion than her own thoughts and memories, seeing how, during the years of her absence, this narrow creek had worn a deeper, darker channel through the cañon; how that old tree had lost its leaves and green

branches forever, and stood naked and riven against the sky that had once nourished it so tenderly with refreshing rain and warming sun; and how some old trail she had followed in her childhood had lost itself in a rank, tall growth of ferns and grasses. She surely loved her own people with the same fervency as of old, and yet she realized that her life had somehow grown apart from theirs, and in those thoughts and feelings she longed to entertain they could have no share. Her life needed something which the old home — though perfect and inexpressibly dear to her still — could not supply. She tried to persuade herself she had outgrown it; that the expansion of her feelings needed yet other interests and hopes; that her little school of children, every one of whose childish, innocent faces were dear to her, the friends in that little valley town far away, and her all-absorbing work, had so grown into her life that the old home, though incomparably dearer than all these, could not quite compensate her for the loss of them.

It was in a measure true. She had outgrown a good deal of the old life; and yet why was it that most of the years that intervened held but little part in her cherished memories? The truth was, that she did not want to understand herself. She scarcely dared to admit the truth, and so she strove to explain away her feelings with whatever excuse she could. The time had come when, although her home and her own people held their old share in her affections, there was still another place unfilled, one which she had thought could never be occupied again after the loss of her early love, the emptiness of which made her life imperfect and lonely.

The shock of discovering George's unfaithfulness to her trustful love had been severe at first, but it had quickly given place to happier, more peaceful feelings. Always in her thoughts of that awful day she had unconsciously taken refuge in the Doctor's protecting friendship, and it gave her a comfort that served almost as a recompense for all the pain she had suffered. "After all," she thought, "the wound in my heart was no longer fresh, and had left only its scar, which throbbed sometimes with the old pain. Years had passed, and both the sorrow and the joy I once felt had been worn away by my busy life into only a sacred memory, and at the last it held no active part in my feelings or my hopes, though I fondly imagined it satisfied my whole life."

Looking back, the first years she had spent at Locustville seemed like a dream, receding farther and farther into the past. She could dwell calmly on the old scenes that had once held such a mighty power over her young heart, and smile coldly on the strange charm which then enchained her. And yet that last summer somehow came back to her in rare, sweet glimpses of joy which she could not put aside. "It was because the Doctor was so good to me, after all the years of sorrow I had lived through alone," she thought. "I am strong, but for that very reason it seems a relief which is almost a delight to put away the burdens for a little while, and lean trustingly in the dark hours of weariness and discouragement on some good, tried friend who is loyal and earnest in every thought and word. How kindly he helped me when that last bitter stroke came that shut out of my past all its sad but

sacred sweetness! The unspoken sympathy he gave me was more and better than anything he could have said. I can never be grateful enough to my good friend." But she did not realize how far she had allowed him to enter into her heart, so that when the time came for his help and kindness, he had been in a position to render her the mute sympathy which she could accept. "The Doctor is peculiar," she thought, while trying to explain her own feelings, and excuse them somewhat to herself. "One could never regard him as an ordinary person. He is so constant, so upright, so kind, and yet so different from every one else; somehow every event in our acquaintance is as firmly fixed in my memory as if I had a vital interest in it. From that day when I first saw him driving through the streets of Locustville, the picture he made in my mind has but gained greater interest with every subsequent meeting, until I really feel as if it were something very pleasant, and happened just as I would like to have had it, considering how I have come to respect the Doctor since. I am glad it made an impression on my mind, and yet I do so wonder why it did. I cannot explain it, and cannot be thankful enough that he was so friendly in those last bitter days of the revival of old thoughts and feelings. I should have sunk utterly in despairing sorrow but for the thought of him which sustained me. It is because his character is so strangely kind, that it fastens itself on one's mind strongly and irresistibly." Yet Lois would not admit that it was because she missed the Doctor that her old home had lost something of its satisfying charm. Still less would she acknowledge that it had anything

to do with her fondness for Louisville and its quiet rural scenes. She told herself that she loved it because the best of her happiness there and her sacred memories had utterly and miserably perished and since our lives must grow more or less by our environments and our every-day associations, she had transferred some of that disappointed affection to her adopted home, because its familiar features had endeared themselves to her empty heart.

And sitting there alone in the still, majestic woods, so utterly removed from the influence of the outer world, Lois let the tender beauty of nature all around her pour into her heart a soothing peace and soften all its sorrows, its hopes, its fears, into something calm and trustful and happy. And many a time while half reclining in some moss-covered nook in a wall of gray, rugged rocks, and watching the hues of the Indian summer veil the mountains in a cloud of purple smoke, and when, as the day declined and the red sunlight fell aslant upon the twilight-gathering peaks, she saw it grow thicker and more glorious in the fading light and change into a bright mist over all the landscapes, like the pearly bloom upon the blueness of the grape, the thought would come, "How grandly beautiful it is up here! — so wild, so boundless, and so free, like one's visions of the celestial mountains"; and then with a little pang her fond heart would return to other scenes in the far-away valley, as if afraid that by her momentary forgetfulness she had been disloyal in her love for them.

For often there returned to her remembrances of that pleasant valley country, with its pretty homes, its blos-

coming gardens, and its quaint, green orchards, dotting the broad expanse of golden grain-fields that stretched far and wide over the rolling slopes; and thoughts also of the quiet village, its broad, shady streets leading out past many trim, neat houses, until at last they ended in the wide pastures where the road grew hard and smooth, and the leaf-strewn sidewalks gave place to narrow paths along the fences and beneath the sheltering locusts. And chief among those pleasant scenes she recalled the homeward drives she had taken with the Doctor, when the day grew late and the sunlight was waning into a subdued and mellow splendor. The atmosphere of contentment and peace which the Doctor always brought with him associated itself with the memories of those times, and brought a quiet rapture unlike anything she had ever felt before. And so no wonder she liked to return to those scenes, when with the recollection of the endless apple orchards by the roadside, shadowy with rich, dark leaves that hid the ripening fruit, the low buzz of the bees flying slowly in and out between the fence-pickets from the odorous clover-beds, the sunlight fluttering in a soft glory of tender green and fretted gold on the feathery leaves of the locust avenues, and the drowsy, evening quiet gathering slowly as they drove along, there came back also the thrill of joy and tranquillity that seemed sweeter and lovelier with each returning.

The hard and bitter experiences Lois had borne were all forgotten, and her early youth renewed, when she and the girls rummaged through the old garret after books and pictures they had enjoyed in their childhood, or searched through the hay-scented barn for nests of eggs.

They all seemed to be so proud of her, so kind, so loving. Not a shade of the old love had died out of their hearts, and they took up their former life right where it had ended. Ah! what evenings they had, seated around the blazing hearth, recalling the old times, living again in the by-gone days! Lois had many things to tell; how busy her life had been, how happy sometimes, at others how sad and lonely. And then the girls would think of innumerable questions to ask about the people they had met in Locustville on their short visits to Lois there, and John — mischievous, kind-hearted, faithful John — would make some absurd remark which would set the company all to laughing, and the long evening would scarcely seem to have begun before the ash-frosted embers on the hearth, and Aunt Jemima also, warned them that people sometimes went to bed at night. Two, three, often four reminders had to be given before they could be persuaded to disperse, and then only on compulsion from Lois, who would assure Aunt Jemima, whose kind face would sometimes look a little weary and troubled, that they would all be safely out of the way in five minutes, and the promise was always kept.

Dear, good Aunt Jemima! Many were the talks she and Lois had alone. Lois scarcely realized that this kind aunt was not really her own mother. She had never known another home, and cherished but a dim remembrance of some one long ago who used to call her his own dear little blue-eyed girl. Her father had been a minister, whose field of labor lay in the old town near Lucky Streak. There, in the little willow-mantled church now mouldering into ruin, he had preached for

several years, working bravely, and striving to bear up against the loss of his young wife and the many discouragements of his hard lot. But finally, while Lois was almost a baby still, he fell sick, his sensitive spirit unable alone to battle against adversity. He lingered for several months, nursed kindly by his wife's eldest sister, Mrs. Robinson, and at last died, leaving his little girl to the care and protection of her loving aunt. From him Lois inherited all the poetry and sentiment of her nature, much of the pitying charity, and the strong and changeless affection. And so around her adopted home twined all the close, unseverable ties which childhood had formed and after years had strengthened.

Lois had been home a week or more, when one evening the stage-driver handed down a letter for her, postmarked Locustville, that made her heart beat faster and her eyes shine, as she looked at the superscription and failed to recognize Mrs. Mills's hastily written direction. The girls teased her a little about her agitation and the delicate blush that betrayed her, suggesting a beau, and the like; but Lois, almost oblivious of it all, escaped to her own room where she could read her letter in peace. She hardly dared to open it for fear of disappointment, she was so anxious that it should prove to be from Dr. Knapp; but at last, gathering courage, she was rewarded by finding that it was. "Whether it will please you or not to know that your vacation has been lengthened, I cannot say, but I will venture to guess," he wrote; "and I think it will. At any rate, it pleases me. I know that you are in need of it, and I feel that a few weeks of rest and change will do much to bring back the sparkle to your eyes

which so many months of constant toil had somewhat worn away. However, you have no choice now, for the trustees have decided that school shall begin two weeks later than was at first intended, the new roof taking more time than was expected. As you already know, the suggestion of making repairs was not made until nearly time for school to begin, and then it was calculated that a week or two would be ample time to complete them. But that was a mistake, and your school must commence more than a month late. It seems almost like a providential delay, since thereby your kindness to Mrs. Mills did not compel you to forego your much desired visit home.

"To you, far away amid other scenes, my thought often wanders; for into my solitary life few friends like you have ever come, and when I miss you, I thereby miss much of the sunshine that brightens my way." Lois liked that last paragraph. She lingered over it without reading farther for a moment, unconsciously fearful that the Doctor might spoil the thrill of pleasure it gave her by some dignified expression of his feelings, which would make her feel quite like a merry child whose lively play he missed. He had often done this, when by some tender thought, expressed with gentle feeling, she had felt her heart stirred strangely by his words; and then, as if suddenly remembering to whom he spoke, he would quickly change his mood, and rudely dissolve the spell by the utterance of some commonplace thought. And now, more than ever she longed to keep that little touch of sweetness, marred as it was by the fear that the Doctor did not quite mean what he wrote; that in his next sentence he

would so qualify it as to take away all its best force and meaning. These feelings were so unconsciously indulged that Lois did not for a moment realize why she paused and looked out upon the scene below her window, where the hostler was hitching fresh horses to the great, untiring stage, and the dimly lighted lamps cast a warm, yellow glow over the rapidly moving figures.

But when she resumed her reading, the pleasure she had already found was not disturbed by anything the Doctor wrote. "Mrs. Mills deputized me to write this letter," he continued, after some further explanation about the school and the vacation. "She said that since it became my duty to inform her of the news, I could best explain anything of a business nature to you; and though I feel that I can but poorly satisfy the many questions in your mind upon the subject, I have undertaken it for the pleasure it affords me. Your many friends in Locustville are watching patiently for your return. Often when coming out of Mrs. Mills's gate, some one accosts me with the inquiry if she has told me anything from you. And in the hospital there have been grateful remembrances of your ministrations. Nettie supplies me with flowers now; and though the summer is dead, she still finds many fragrant clusters. You know how exhaustless the blossoms seem in that queer old garden around her grandma's house." Little did Lois know, as she read this, what the Doctor was thinking of when he wrote it, — how it recalled a day of early spring when the flowers ran riot over everything in that tangled garden, and the perfumes floated over it so delightful

and so rare that they suggested southern isles freighted to the water's edge with fadeless tropic bloom; and how when the sunshine warmed the buds into blossoms new and beautiful, his own heart had opened like the flowers, and had let so much of the glorious sunlight of love pour into it, that he never could shut it up again. And so no wonder that his letter became a little disconnected just there, where he had stopped so long to dream; but Lois stopped too, and did not notice it.

Her mind returned to Mrs. Hunman's garden also, but with mingled feelings of mortification and pleasure. Associated as it was with drowsy peace and homelike loveliness, there still came back to her the time when she had seen a picture, framed by the rank, tall hollyhocks, of the back garden where Nettie and the Doctor hung out the clothes to dry. She was a little ashamed of the feelings she had then indulged. She had been unjust to the Doctor; and yet she remembered another garden scene with Nettie and Byron in it, which roused very painful thoughts. She had felt somewhat contemptuous about these little incidents, for it had seemed rather out of keeping with the Doctor's grave character that he should so pet and humor the sharp-tongued, fractious Nettie. Now, with many protests, she acknowledged that perhaps the faintest shade of jealousy had chilled her heart, and had deterred her from skilfully removing all misunderstandings, and establishing the most complete good feeling instead. A rosy blush spread over her fair face as she recalled it. "I was so much older than Nettie," she thought. "How wofully absurd of me to feel so! To be sure, I

disliked her, and then I thought she had no right to aspire for the favor of such a glorious man as Dr. Knapp, she was so incapable of appreciating it properly." But Lois did not even give the form of thought to the feeling she was vaguely conscious of possessing, that she had made the mistake of thinking Nettie was somewhat too much interested in the Doctor's friendship. However, she mentally reproved herself. "My conduct was very foolish! I had no reason to think myself in Nettie's way, and on that account to avoid her altogether. Ah! why did I not let her see that we both might have Dr. Knapp for a friend, without quarrelling about it either?" Poor Lois, unconscious of it as she had been at the time, her heart slowly yielding itself to the Doctor's influence had suffered a wound when in the arbor she had heard Nettie's boisterous lamentings, though she had attributed her pain to another cause. She did not know what a strong hold he already had upon her affections; she did not realize that her life, deprived as it had been of the countless beauty of gentleness and love, was being supplied with just these very things, which she took without questioning the reposeful trust they purchased for her.

When she returned to her letter, her cheek still burned with mortification. She could afford to be generous now. The Doctor was really hers, a friend who protected and cared for her, and remained faithful through every circumstance. "I must atone for my unreasonable behavior, and try to forget it utterly," she said to herself. "When I go back to Locustville, I shall call to see the Hummans again, make friends with Nettie, and resume my old associations with

them, regardless of the foolish fears that once drove me away; yes," — and her face grew quiet and happy, as if her eyes, looking afar into the future, saw something sweet worth living for, — "yes, we will take our drives out to the hospital, even though it be winter and the roads muddy. I 'm sure I shall not dread the old place if the Doctor is with me. And some day I will tell him my story. He will sympathize with me, I am sure, in a way that will make the old trouble vanish. Oh! I must try to be so good to him when I return; I owe him more than I can ever repay, but I shall try to reward him some way, though of course he could not like me well enough to let me do very much to show the friendship that will never, never die out of my heart." Lois blushed again, a bright rose-color, because of the boldness of her thoughts; they so startled her that when she looked down again upon the letter she held in her hand she was almost ashamed to finish it.

But she was relieved inexpressibly by something the Doctor wrote toward the last of his letter. By a few carefully worded sentences, she knew he meant that he was guarding her from any painful circumstances that might arise from the presence of the stranger in the hospital. She understood that the end of one sad chapter in her life was near, — that ere the letter reached her all would be over, but she was comforted with the assurance that some one was there to perform the kind offices her forgiving heart would prompt in that last, sorrowful extremity. And then a great wave of peace swept over her, — a peace that could nevermore be broken by that old loss which made her life so sweetly sad, and she said, looking back upon it all with a calm,

untroubled spirit, "It is better so. I am wiser, stronger, for that sorrow; and I am happy now,—happy in a good home, in loving friends, in noble work."

The Doctor's letter made Lois very bright and joyful. Milcie accused her of having a love-letter; but she explained that it was from Dr. Knapp, and Milcie knew quite well who he was, for Lois had described him as a marvel of learning and goodness, and had even gone so far as to confide the fact that he was one of her very warmest friends. "I should like to see that wonderful personage," said Milcie, as Lois joined the family in the sitting-room after finishing her letter; "I wonder if he 'd seem as nice to us as he does to you, Lois."

"I 'd like to see him too," said Lill. "Is he good-looking?"

"Well, rather. He has a kind expression on his face. His features are regular; he is a little stout, and nervous in his manner; and oh dear! he persists in wearing — well, a very bright shade of tan-colored gloves; but to those who know him these things are positively attractive. I 'm sure I would n't have them changed for anything."

"Well," said John, mischievously, poking the fire with his boot, "you 'd see a very eccentric old doctor, my friends, wofully fat and short-winded, with yellow gloves on,—nothing less, girls,—nothing less than real canary-tinted gloves."

"Now, John, that 's too bad of you," said Lois, really shocked by his want of respect for such a person as the Doctor. "They are no such thing as canary-colored gloves. And he is n't fat either,—just slightly stout, you know, as good-natured people most always are;

and as for being eccentric, it is worth while being different from other men when that difference consists in being better than they are"; and Lois gave a pleasant little laugh as if she had utterly vanquished John.

"You 'd better not stay around too long, John," cautioned Lill. "While you are teasing Lois the stage will start off without the mail."

John glanced at the great slow-voiced clock over the mantel, and starting up, bounded hurriedly out of the room, putting his head back through the door before shutting it just long enough to say, "Fat, Lois, — and queer, with yaller gloves."

"He has plenty of time when the stage comes these days," said Lill, with a sigh. "Absolutely nobody but the driver and the expressman on this evening. That fire was a terrible thing for the mines."

"Have they rebuilt much yet?" asked Lois.

"But very little. Teams are busy hauling lumber from the saw-mill at Joy's Gap for the new hotel. But it will be a long time before the town will be rebuilt."

Lois read the Doctor's letter again that night before she went to bed, regardless of the girls' teasing. And as she looked from her window out upon the night blackened by the awful shadows of the gloomy woods, and cheered by the pale glow from the far-off worlds overhead, old memories thronged back, and brought her sad and mournful thoughts of the past, mingled with others, sweet and tender, of that second home which she loved, and that kind friend whose generous care seemed guarding her from all evil. And so as she leaned her head far out of the window, under the clear, trembling lights of heaven, for one moment she bowed

it reverently, and the weird night-winds bore away on their swift wings, up through the starry wastes of space, a little half uttered prayer of thanksgiving to Him whose love is over all.

Next day, after Lois and the girls had made the old house shine with neatness, and when the cold morning freshness had given place to the short balmy afternoon, Lois set out for a long walk through the rugged hills. John stopped her in the porch to give her a large field-glass. "See here, Lois," he said. "The driver left this for you last night, so you could enjoy the scenery better. Thoughtful of him, wasn't it? You see he has his eye on somebody. He said last night that that blush, when you got your letter, was prettier than a rose, and that he'd write you a letter himself if you'd only blush again like that when he handed it down."

"Nonsense, John! Stop your foolishness. Paul would not say that, he's a sensible man."

"I'm not disputing it. I think he shows remarkably good taste in one particular. But he *did* say it, I'll be bound! There's a matrimonial chance for you, Lois. Here take the glass. It will enable you to watch for the stage with much better assurance of success."

Lois pleased with the prospect of a good view, decided to climb a rocky old peak towering high over the surrounding hills, knowing that from its summit she could look for many miles over the wild mountainous region tinged with the soft, mellow glory of the autumn.

After a long and toilsome climb, she at last reached the rock crested top, too exhausted to think of the entrancing wonders spread out below her, and so she sat down among the sheltering madrotos to rest. The

Doctor's letter was in her pocket, and under pretence of assuring herself of something concerning her vacation, she allowed herself to look it over again. Of course, in such a long, friendly letter the dry business subjects would have to be left until the interesting news was exhausted. And so the letter was read once more. Lois put it in her pocket again with a happy sigh, and taking up her field-glass, looked far away on to the distant mountain-sides, and into the deep, narrow valleys. "Dr. Knapp would love to see these wondrous Sierra beauties," she thought. "That great chain of snowy pinnacles rising above the purple mountain folds, and the nearer pine belt, dark and richly green, covering all the great foothill region, would seem as grand to him as it does to me." Then she looked at the stage road, winding its red course over the hills, till away in the distance it turned to a mere trail, where it descended a great range of hills to the river ferry.

The slow, flat boat had just left the farther shore, and was drifting across the stream's rapid current. Lois could see that there was some vehicle crossing to take the road into the higher country, and that the boat was not going across to get passengers; but her glass somehow became unsteady in her hands while she looked, and she could not quite make out what it was. She wiped it hastily with her handkerchief, and placing it firmly before her eyes, looked again, and lo! — strange, unaccountable sight! — there on the open ferry-boat was Lady Snowdrop, hitched to the high-wheeled gig, her delicate nose over the railing, and some one very like the Doctor holding her bridle. The glass dropped from Lois's hands. Oh dear! the gig!

the gig again!" she cried aloud, startling the timid lizards among the rocks, and causing a momentary rustle among the glossy madroño leaves overhead,—"a ghostly vision of it haunting me even here in this far-away mountain country. Oh dear! what shall I do! what shall I do!"

Was that little shiny-wheeled cart supreme over her destiny, that it should always appear simultaneously with the thought of it? Lois wonderingly asked herself if it was not because she thought of it too often, and if it appeared at all, she would surely be thinking of it.

But she could not refrain from looking through the glass once more, though scarcely expecting to see the mysterious gig. No; not a sign of it was visible. There was the narrow, sand-colored road leading up from the ferry, gradually melting into the rich, red soil as it ascended the hills; yes, and surely there was the ferry-boat on its way back across the river, the ferry-man standing near the forward part alone, looking up the curving stream, but no trace of the gig, or Lady Snowdrop, or the Doctor. Lois suddenly became aware of the fact that she was trembling. "Such an apparition as that! no wonder I am nervous! I'll look down toward home to see what they are doing around the house; perhaps that will help me to forget it." But home soon lost its charm, while the glass was gradually turned toward the far-off stage road on the hills, and Lois was looking again for the great phantom. Yes; there it was again,—again! the gig, as natural as life! It was coming up the long hill above the river, and had reached a point where she could view it dis-

tinctly. There was the Doctor, half reclining on the broad seat, looking out on one side toward the velvety chemisal-clothed hills that rose from the river-bed; the reins sagged low in his listless hold, and Lois almost thought she heard him whistling softly when the wind stirred in the pines around her. "It looks as if they stopped to rest at the foot of the hill, the horrible phantoms!" she said, watching with tireless earnestness the objects which she could not possibly persuade herself were real.

On up the grade they slowly travelled, sometimes scarcely seeming to move, until the Doctor's ghost roused itself from its reverie to urge the ghost of Lady Snowdrop into greater speed. Often they stopped. And Lois could see that the wheels of the gig were always turned across the road, and Lady Snowdrop headed toward the graded cliff, so that she did not have to hold the weight of the gig while she rested. "Just like her, the lazy animal!" Lois exclaimed, — "just as she would be sure to do on a long hill like that! I wonder if it cannot be some phenomenon, — I wonder if it is not a mirage, or something like that!" Vainly she tried to detect some indistinct shadowy contour that would confirm her suspicion; but the phantom vehicle still crept slowly up the hill, and she watched it long and intently, until it nearly reached the top without a sign of approaching dissolution. Then she thought of looking into the sky above it for an inverted picture of the wonderful thing, but still in vain; not even the faintest shadow rested on the soft broken clouds, nor any vague, faded outline on the filmy mists through which the blue of heaven shone.

But when she fixed the glass on the world below, and found the exact spot where the stage road wound its bright course along, no trace of the gig climbing the hill was there either. "Oh, mercy! It is gone again!" cried Lois, covering her eyes with both her hands; "he could not possibly have reached the top at the rate he was going; he could not have reached it anyway, even if he hurried. It is surely a delusion that melted away when I was looking at the sky."

The short afternoon was growing late, and already the sun was casting long, deep shadows into the wooded valleys, and shining redly faint on the hilltops. Lois looked at her watch. She had but a little while to stay, before it would be necessary to turn her steps homeward; but still she sat and anxiously watched the next spot where the road appeared in sight; she must surely satisfy herself that what she had seen was really some awful vision of the gig, more unaccountable and wonderful than her dreams of it. Hopelessly she canvassed the possibilities of the phantom's reality. The Doctor could not come from Mrs. Mills, or any of the family, nor yet from any of her other friends in Locustville. They would not send the Doctor,—O no! How utterly absurd that would be! He would have nothing to come for himself. No, surely nothing. The Doctor would certainly be the last one in the world to do *that*. No matter how much he desired to see her, nor how necessary it might be, he would be too sensitive, too modest, to do such a bold thing in defiance of a gossiping village. George? No, not even for him. The Doctor would not undertake such a journey himself, even for George's sake. Why would it be necessary?

If they wanted her why not send a message? If there was any secret for her why such unexplainable haste in revealing it? One certainty the girl could not be real. It was another delusion—a waking dream of that strange thing which seemed forever haunting her.

Long she sat and watched the road until all possibility of seeing the phantom again was gone. Higher and higher crept the shadows on the surrounding hills, and down in the valleys the evening mists gathered and the forests seemed folding themselves in the dusky wings of night, till at last the glass fell from Lois's tired hands, when the far-off hills and the winding road she watched grew faint and glimmered in the waning light.

Lois hurried away from her rock-built watch-tower on the hill-crest, with one parting look at the cold, gray crags, and the plumy mosses spread like curtains of emerald plush upon them, wondering with frightened what strange spell nightfall would bring to [illegible] chanted spot. Down the precipitous [illegible] around jutting rocks, and through thick masses of underbrush, and tall, majestic groves of [illegible]. "What will they think at home?" she asked herself. "It is so unusually late to be returning from a walk. The whole household will [illegible] their eyes for a glimpse of me and wonder what way to look"; and the hedge-[illegible] bird flew swiftly and [illegible] seemed to make the [illegible]

Down in the [illegible] dense wood fringing [illegible] crossed the road just [illegible]

enter it, the shadows were so thick there, and the way seemed so long, winding in an almost endless labyrinth among the rocks and trees and bushes. Some old straggler from the road might "turn in" there for the night, it was so sheltered and so convenient to the highway; and again, — she was ashamed to confess it even to herself, — might not the awful apparition assume some strange, new form, and confront her there in the gathering night? Still she must go, the sooner the better; for the sun had already set behind the purple ranges, and the twilight would soon fade. She resolved to be blind and deaf, to know no object except to reach the open road; and so summoning all her courage, she plunged into the wood. The fallen leaves rustled with weird sounds as she flew along, gray mosses, like the hoary beard of some old jinnee, brushed her face and startled her, and the network of tangled boughs above let in long white fingers of light that seemed to clutch at her, and writhe with strange contortions when she eluded their grasp.

At last she was on the edge of the grove, and with one breathless bound she gained the open roadside. A red light from the wintry sunset greeted her, and the terrible influence of the dark wood was all forgotten. There in the softening twilight across the road was the friendly old house, and there also were the girls on the porch, watching for her coming. And what else? Yes, unmistakably, there was the Doctor and the gig, and Lady Snowdrop much travelled-stained and crest-fallen, close by the long line of hitching-posts. No ghosts this time; they were real, — made of solid substance, that would not melt away like the airy fabrics of her dreams.

No wonder the girls felt as if they were being entertained by a splendid little drama as they looked on. Was it not interesting, indeed, that this stranger, Lois's Dr. Knapp without a doubt, should drive up unexpectedly at the close of day, should stop in front of the house, look up with just that kindly face she had described, and say a cordial good evening to them, and then jump out of his odd little rig, and proceed very nervously to tie his horse, as if in great haste, though he took time enough to tie three horses as gentle and drooping as Lady Snowdrop was just then? Was it not more interesting, still, to see Lois dash out of the wood, and catching sight of the Doctor, actually run toward him with her hand extended as if forgetful of everything else?

"Oh, Dr. Knapp, I am so glad to see you!" she said warmly. "Is it really you, any way, up here in this out-of-the-way country?"

The Doctor shook hands cordially. "Really me, Miss Warren. No doubt of it, — no doubt of it; though I cannot explain just how I came to be here quite yet. It might be a long story, you see. And how have you been since I saw you last. Very well? Ah! I can see that; no need to inquire, — no need to ask, for I can see that."

"I could hardly believe my senses when I saw you coming, though Lady Snowdrop and the little gig are almost unmistakable. I am sure this is a pleasant surprise —" Lois began, but the Doctor interrupted her.

"Yes, Lady Snowdrop is quite unmistakable," he replied with a laugh, scarcely thinking of what he said

he was wondering so intently whether it was the rosy reflection from the sunset or a fine blush that made Lois's face so radiant and bright. "We 've had quite a jaunt, Miss Warren; and we really succeeded in beating the stage by almost an hour," he added, taking out his watch, and dropping one of his yellow gloves in his hurry. "We went at rather lively gait, you see, through the hollows, resting on the longest hills. Lady Snowdrop is very much abused with mountain roads. They are not much like those at Locustville, are they? And then she could n't know, as I did, that night would bring her to such a grand old homelike place as this, and such a pleasant little friend as you."

No need now to wonder about the rich reflection from the red glories in the west, for Lois stood with her back to the sunset, her face still glowing with bright tints of the rose, and *both* the yellow gloves at her feet.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE CONFESSION.

Wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be.
MILTON.

LET us look back over the preceding week, and review the causes which brought about the Doctor's visit to the mountains. The days that followed George's story of his early love brought peace and even comfort to the Doctor's mind. Somehow, the recitation of those by-gone events, tinged with the rosy hues of youth and hope, held as deep a magic for the Doctor as for even Lois herself. They were a part of her own pure, bright life; and since they were dear and sacred to her, they were also dear and sacred to him. And with her he shared the pain that came when she knew beyond refutation that her love had been in vain, only with his clear, unerring foresight he realized that perhaps it was best for Lois in the end. When that old, sweet love she had cherished so reverently must perish as a worthless thing, would not her heart long for something that was earnest and noble with which to fill the vacant place? Would it not lead her to look with stronger, brighter hope into her future, and feel that it held something better than the holy memories of a vanished love? There was no tinge of selfishness in the thought. He felt that hope for him was dead; but he was so anxious

for her welfare and happiness that he would gladly bear the sting which the reflection brought, if he could only know that the lovely dawning of her life, which held such a charm for him, would round out into a glorious, perfected womanhood.

If the Doctor had been a younger man, perchance the contemplation of that first strong love which had entered Lois's life might have brought a pang of jealousy; but to him whose vision had been clarified by time and pain, it only called forth a generous sympathy. And yet perhaps he sometimes felt a touch of indignation, that one to whom had been given such perfect, trustful love had not held it forever as the crown and jewel of his life; had not braved any and all dangers for its sake; and had only given it up when death robbed him of all his earthly treasures. There is something sad and painful in the thought that often what we hold most dear lies just beyond our reach, where its most precious worth is squandered by irreverent hands. And yet there is a wise Providence that appoints all our pained steps through life's cheerless deserts, and in the end all afflictions appear just and for the best.

The Doctor felt this, and it gave him comfort that came without a spice of selfish sorrow. Though he had nothing to hope for, he felt that Lois's life would in some way be better for that early grief; and so he could look upon these distressing events with a far-seeing magnanimity, feeling that they soon would pass away, and time would usher in for her a season that would seem the sweeter for past adversities.

As the week wore on, the Doctor saw that George was slowly failing, and so he made his visits rather brief,

lest George, who seemed usually fond of his company, should overexert himself in their talks.

But one afternoon, as the Doctor had started for home, in driving past the hospital he happened to remember some trifling direction that he had omitted to give to one of the nurses, so he tied Lady Snowdrop to the slim iron hitching-post in front of the great brick building, and went in to perform his errand. On his way out he paused at the top of the stairs to look at his watch, and finding that he had a few minutes to spare, thought he would go a second time to George's room. Deep down in the recesses of his heart he felt that he was doing it for Lois's sake; he knew that her sweet, forgiving nature, when the bitterest pangs of her grief were over, would prompt just such unfailing kindness, even to one who had wronged her; and so there was a certain pleasure to the Doctor in the feeling that he could do for Lois what she then had not the power to do herself.

He builded better than he knew. By that one little act, which he had hardly hoped could be productive of much good, he smoothed the way, not only for the happiness of others, but for her whom he so tenderly loved and longed to serve.

As he entered the room, George was lying motionless, as if asleep, but his large, dark eyes were open wide, and fixed on the bright rift of light that stole through the drawn curtains and touched his pallid cheek.

"Well, my boy," said the Doctor, cheerfully, as he went over by the bedside and carefully adjusted the coverlet, "how are you now?" George brightened, and

holding out his hand with a pleased smile, replied that he was feeling rather weak, but resting easily.

"I'm glad you came in, Doctor," he added; "sit down and stay with me a while. I'm better, and feel the need of company somewhat now."

The Doctor took a seat near the head of the bed, and said kindly, "Keep up your courage, and soon I trust you will come out as strong as ever."

"No," said George, gravely; "I think I shall not come out at all. I'm stamped already with the doom of death."

The Doctor knew it. He knew that this final rousing was the last kindling spark of the ember ere it went out into utter darkness; so he tried only to cheer the dying man.

"O well," George went on, tossing about restlessly, as if ready to exhaust that last revival of his strength in the effort. "We've all got to go some time. It's pretty bad to have to give up when young; but I won't complain. There is no one to care much except myself, if I do have to yield. I'm alone in the world. No one has ever helped me, except maybe our good little friend Lois, — she did all she could, but under the circumstances that was n't much. Perhaps if some one had, when I most needed it, I should not be where I am now." He paused a minute, and the silence was unbroken, except by the distant footsteps falling softly in the corridors; and then George said, with a burst of enthusiasm, "I wish I'd known you, Doctor, before this thing happened to me. I think we would have been friends, and your advice would have been worth more than perhaps even I now know, and I realize

only too well that I have paid the dearest price for all my follies. A certain glow comes over me — a kindred feeling — whenever you call in to see me. I've sometimes thought that you must take an unusual interest in me, Doctor, for I was never very famous for my friendly feeling toward men, and something must have stirred me up in this case."

"I *do* take an interest in you, — an unusual interest," replied the Doctor; and then slowly, with his eyes fixed on vacancy, as if his mind was looking afar off into the future, he added, "I think you may consider me your friend."

George's dark eyes blazed brighter, and he moved restlessly, as he put one hand out from under the bedclothes and touched the Doctor's sleeve. "Then tell me," he said earnestly, "am I really going to die? Had I better make every preparation for death? Much depends on it, and I must know to-day. I have something to tell. A strange presentiment came over me this morning after you went away, and I feel that I have not many more hours to live. If you are my friend, tell me whether I am about to die, — whether I shall live until your next visit."

The Doctor sat in quiet thought for a moment; and then shaking his head just a trifle gravely, he said, "I would advise you not to put off the thoughts of death until too late. We should always be prepared."

George did not speak for some minutes, and when the Doctor looked again toward the face on the pillow, the dark eyes were even brighter than before, and the strange, unsteady light in them burned with a new and awful fire; his pale cheek was flushed; and the glossy

dark curls above his white forehead were damp and heavy. The Doctor significantly noted all these. "Ah," he thought, "it is very near. Night is fast coming, — the last gleam of the light, the sunset glow, and even the falling dews, — truly it is here."

"My friend," he said aloud, "take no unnecessary anxiety. Let me tell you what to do. I am your friend, — I will be your confidant. Tell *me* what weighs upon your mind, and it shall be as safe as with yourself. And if this confidence shall not be needed, we will look upon it as if it had never been given."

That cool, soothing hand on the moist forehead held a subtile magic, for George clutched at it convulsively, as if it were his last anchorage, and turning with a deep-drawn sigh he said, "I will."

"Do it calmly, — quietly," cautioned the Doctor. "You are not strong; remember that."

The sufferer moved again upon his pillow and sighed deeply. "You promise me," he said earnestly, — "you assure me that you are my friend? That my secret shall never be divulged, except — except to those who must know after I am gone, and then only with a shield to protect my friend?"

"Be assured," said the Doctor. "It will be safe."

"Well," he began, "I must tell you first that I received my burns when the little mountain town of Lucky Streak went up in fire and smoke. It was a love affair that began my troubles, — always love affairs driving me about. Having obtained a position as assayer in those mountain mines, I met Miss Nellie Minton on my way up; and when later she discovered that I had fallen desperately in love with a beautiful Miss

Willis spending the season there, she threatened to expose my early misfortunes in this place to my ladylove, to Lois's people who lived near, and also to write of my whereabouts to friends here, if I did not assist her in her scheme to capture the young manager of the mine, — a fellow with whom she had become wonderfully infatuated. It was all effected in the sly way she had of doing things; and knowing so well how ruinously she could carry out her threats, I was afraid of her. She drove me from one position to another, entangled me, watched me, harassed me, until I was nearly distracted. To aggravate matters, Miss Willis took a fancy to Nellie's flame, and jealousy and rage turned the red-headed minx into a perfect vixen. All her spite and chagrin she visited on me, until I was driven to desperation.

"The manager at last got into difficulties with the workmen, and they all struck for a change of management or different treatment. The superintendent, fearing his dependence, was almost helpless. Things went on, however, and showed no indications of a settlement. The whole ambition of my life depended in a great measure on the manager's defeat. If he could be forced to leave, that slippery-tongued Willis would cease persecuting me, and my way would be open toward winning Miss Willie, who was attracted [illegible] Ned Dennett, the manager was a [illegible] I meant no great wrong to any one, only to get rid of that big, strong fellow who was [illegible] to get along well anywhere in the entire [illegible] Miss Willis had another admirer, an elderly and [illegible] who travelled for his health. He had been a friend of the

Willis family for many years, and hence presumed to make himself a suitor for Miss Willis's hand. Coming to our mountain retreat, he settled down for a month or so, and became insanely jealous of the manager. He was jealous of me also, but I let him get hold of a little flirtation I had with a dashing Spanish girl, and that tended to satisfy him a good deal. 'It's a serious matter,' he would say to me, a dark cloud settling over his thin face. 'Something must be done'; and then he would talk wildly of using a revolver, and paint the case in the most gloomy aspect. Driven to recklessness, we at last decided to take some action. I depended greatly on this man Knowles, and yet I dared not trust him. We had to keep that prying Nellie out of our secret, for of course she would suffer no wrong done in the direction that most interested us, so there was no alternative. We were compelled to take the course we at last chose, or detection would follow, and our scheme would fail to work. It was our object to bring about a settlement of the strike, and drive the manager out."

George lay still for a few minutes, his face expressionless and his eyes fixed, as if he lived again in those by-gone scenes. The first of his story had been given hurriedly and disconnectedly, with small attempt in the brief outline to justify his conduct or picture his feelings. But that pause brought a great change with it. The dews began to stand out in beads of crystal on his forehead, and he pulled nervously at the bedclothes to shield himself from the dim light that broke through the drawn curtains. While the Doctor drew them together more closely, he half rose on his pillow and looked wildly around the room.

"It was a windy night in the late autumn, with a cloudy sky above that threatened rain, which we chose as the time to carry out our plans," he began, half deliriously, as the Doctor sat down again. "I remember distinctly, though it seems now as if all these things must have happened years ago, — how weird were the voices in the pines, how black and ferny the huge pointed trees stood outlined against the horizon, and how faint and dim and ghostly the distant line of snow-peaks glimmered under the white lights of heaven.

"We went out at midnight," he half whispered, after a pause, — "out into the woods that grew near the town, waiting quietly behind the rocks to see that no breath of life stirred near us. Oh the shadows!" he cried, faintly. "They tangled and spread and deepened all around us, though the moon was hidden under dim, gray folds of cloud, until they rested dark and heavy on our brains. They have been there ever since, though we made a light, — we made a light," — he softly mused, and leaned back on his pillow with closed eyes. "I *must* tell the rest," he said, at length, rousing himself with an effort, "though it is so hard to call up those terrible scenes that have passed before me in ghastly pictures every hour since. We never meant to burn the town. A match touched to the dry grass around a dead pine began it, and we thought it would creep over toward the mill and threaten it a little. That was all we meant to do. Then our confident manager would be irrefutably proved an incendiary; for we took care to leave traces of his guilt where the fire started. Everything had been arranged to reflect on him; we knew that he would remain up part of the

night to see that all things were going well, and the fact that he was dressed and around at such an hour would look suspicious. Besides, he would have a motive which all would recognize. Ah, what misery that night brought! The fire, fanned by the high wind and fed by the grass and trees, broke away from our control, burning up the slope instead of toward the mill. Beginning in the dry branches of the grove beside the hotel, it flew in great sheets of flame through the trees, while flying sparks from the dead boughs kindled on the roof of the building, and then all was lost. I shrink from the scene of that night; I long to undo the mischief I committed. So let me draw the veil quickly over the burning town, over the homeless hundreds fighting through the night, over spectacles I dare not even mention. In that terrible hour desperation seized me, — a sense of utter recklessness. By breaking a water-pipe I saw a chance to hinder the manager from putting out the fire around the mill, for that would be evidence in his favor, and since the fire had burned the great hotel, the issue became one of life or death to Knowles and me. I did not leave my opportunity unimproved. But just when success seemed about to smile on my deed, I discovered that our cause was utterly lost.

"The Spanish girl with whom I had the little love affair had caught me lighting the fire in the woods. It was our quarrel, I think, that caused me to neglect it until it was beyond our control, and prevented me from getting back to the hotel in time to rise in hastily donned apparel with the others, when the alarm was given. I was trying to persuade the dark-faced gypsy

[illegible] believe it. [illegible] vowed she would [illegible] tion. I [illegible] I told her I would [illegible] fire, and settle our misunderstanding to her satisfaction. She was very angry, and I realized that she would be hard to control. Thus we parted.

"When the fog-horn had burned until its fuel was nearly gone, and little was left untouched by fire, except the great white form protected by the winds that blew the flames backward, she arose from the balcony where she had fallen suffocated by the smoke, and insanely angered, perhaps because I had not kept our appointment, strove to divulge her awful secret, though death stared her in the face. She jumped to the ground, but she still lived; and then I knew that I must hasten to put distance between me and the story she would tell, blackened by her fierce jealousy and her bitter disappointments.

"Out into the darkness of night I hurried, along the dusty road that led away from the town. The pines leaned over my pathway and whispered, 'Fiend! fiend!' the winds howled angrily around, and whipped the long tangles of brush into my face. But still I pressed on, suffering agonies from my burns, and knowing not whither I went. After I had gone some distance, the cloudy moon lighted my way over the broad stage road that led from the mines through thick pine woods for many a mile, to a wayside house called Robinson's. I thought if I could only reach it and get help, I might escape before morning brought news of my work. On

I struggled, often stumbling when the overhanging pines darkened the road so I could not see, often I fell into the thick dust that suffocated and blinded me, and often I sought the cooling mud of some wayside creek for my smarting face. The bursted pipe at Lucky Streak had left me deluged with water, and the cold winds blowing on my damp clothing chilled me to the marrow. Oh, what a miserable night that was! I had to keep in the grass by the wayside as much as I could, so as to leave few telltale tracks in the road, and my own passage rustling along the brush sounded to my strained ears like the pursuit of fifty horsemen. A hundred times I looked back over the moonlit road to see who followed, but I only saw its red dust gleaming pale in the dim light, and the lonesome pines crowding in thick, black masses on either side, swept like grain stalks in the howling wind. A hundred times I paused to watch from some point on the hillside that red glow in the distance, great spears of crimson shooting upward, and one awful, billowy mass of fire reaching high into the heaven, where the strong wind caught it and twisted it into a rope of flame until dissolved in storms of sparks that floated away and perished against the background of red-stained sky. Far around the horizon that red reflection lurked, and cast a strange, unearthly radiance down, even when the hollows hid the terrible scene that caused it from my view. Still more lonely grew my way as I hastened on, farther and farther behind faded the red glow of the spreading fire, until at last the woods shut around me and swallowed the road in their black, threatening shadow. Fear possessed me at last, and I cried aloud

for help, and vainly strained my eyes for the beacon-light of a friendly lantern coming to my aid or the sign of some isolated cabin on the rugged hills. Still in vain.

"I hurried till I dropped half fainting by the way-side, and then I shouted long and loud again for help. Only the faint, mocking echoes and the wild winds answered to my call. Shout after shout pierced through the gorges, until I longed for even foes in my distress. The white stumps changed to ghostly forms standing stark and dumb, and looking at me with stony eyes from the woods, the gray rocks turned to monsters, sluggish in their sleep, and the tinted clouds overhead seemed heralding the dawning of the judgment-day. Weak and unable to rise, I crawled into the dense shadow of the pine grove by the way, and laying my face against the cold, crackling needles that covered the earth, a great, soothing wave of blackness stole slowly over my anguished mind, and I knew no more.

"When I awoke the morning light was beaming cold and gray, and a gentle rain was falling. After two or three attempts, I rose and limped on pained, stiffened legs to the road again. No sign of life or habitation was near, but all around were the dense, uncleared woods, and away across the hills, above the broken lines of slender pine points in the east, burned still a dull red glow on the clouds. A sweet, fresh scent from the newly wet dust revived me, and I managed to creep along by the roadside for quite a distance, until the rain began to fall more steadily, and exhausted I sat down among some sheltered rocks, and waited. Presently, through the soft beating of the rain on the

pine leaves, and the far-off roar of the wind in the trees, came a great rumble and clatter and hissing, as of a team coming down the rocky, graded hill road. Nearer and nearer came the sound, sometimes growing fainter in the bends of the road, and then roaring out again, until the shouts of the driver to his horses reached me, and I tried to hide among the rocks. But desperation drove me out to the edge of the road again, where I awaited the appearance of what seemed my forlorn hope. I scarcely know what happened, what I said, what I did, except that the teamster stopped and asked me how I had burned my face. My month's salary was in my pocket. I offered it all to him if he would care for me, and take me secretly out of the mountain regions to the city.

"He accepted the offer, whipped out his whiskey-flask for me, helped me take off my wet clothing, rolled me up in his warm blankets in the bottom of his empty wagon, spread a canvas over me to keep away the rain, and started on. Again I lost my senses, and when I awoke we were in the lower foothills, where the country was more open, and the roads were smooth and brown. We stopped at a ranch-house near the road, and the teamster went in for a moment, and coming out again, began unhitching his horses. Then a pretty, kind-faced woman came out and said he might take me in, and I was carried into a warm, clean room, and put into a comfortable bed, where I could rest and sleep. My face no longer smarted so unbearably, but it was dressed, and I was fed and warmed, and at that place we remained till the next day. By that time I was able to be moved, and we started on our way again.

"Little I remember of the journey except that within a few miles of the railroad terminus the stage from Quartz Hill, a place above Lucky Streak, passed. The driver shouted the news to the inquiring teamster, — the town had burned, the mine was saved, and the excitement was great throughout the country. Raising myself on my elbow, I looked over the edge of the wagon at the crowded passengers. A gleam of Nellie's red hair from inside met my eye, and then Mabel's fair, rose-stained cheek came before the window as they dashed ahead. I must not take the city train that day, I told my man. So he said there was only one other, that for Tenayee, and we would have to wait two hours. And that is how I came to be here in the old hospital."

He stopped in his long, breathless story, but his countenance still shone, and his eyes gleamed with the same restless fire. "But let me now make what reparation I may," he went on again. "When I am dead, it will matter not who gains the prize I longed to win; when I am gone," — and he sighed sadly, — "I can never undo the wrongs that I have wrought. But, my friend," he said, and as he leaned out to take the Doctor's hand the latter noticed how thin and wasted his form had grown, — "you are all I have now. Out of the many whom I cared for, out of all those for whose good-will and favor I sought, none are left me now in these last, lonely hours, — none but you. Yet you are a true friend, I am sure of that, since you do not come here as a protector and a helper, for the sake of old times or friendship, only as a sincere and charitable though new-found friend. And so I give up all I ever

cared for. If I should survive this suffering, I will begin life anew, with you for my adviser, if you will let me. But I will not speak of that now. Time enough when the shadow of death has passed.

"If I should die, here under my pillow in my pocket-book you will find letters written in cypher, and also the cypher with which to read them, sent in different envelopes. They are from Knowles. My flight had been explained as the result of my affair with Nita Logan; for Knowles made our simple flirtation appear much more serious than it really had been. He learned of my whereabouts from the teamster who helped me. They tell the outcome of our miserable work; they also tell how safe and free we are from all blame or exposure. Take them, and restore what you can. I saved them, thinking perhaps I should at the last wish to put them to such use. The sum laid away for the future is for Nita's father and her husband, if they will take it. Perhaps it will be best not to let them know where it came from, though I would like to make this slight reparation for having cast a cloud over Nita's fair name.

"That is all, I guess, Doctor. Do you think you understand it clearly now? If I should live, I shall make amends myself, with your help and advice; if not, the letters are yours. Only spare Knowles. Let the blame rest on me, for I shall be beyond their power, while he is not, and so I must leave it with his own conscience."

A silence fell, after the Doctor had promised again, and reigned long unbroken. The great clock out in the corridor ticked slowly, regularly, and sent the faint sound of its vibrations in through the half-open

door. The light of the late afternoon stole through the curtains, and made a soft, restful twilight in the little room; while the fitful winds outside tossed back and forth the tops of the locust and the poplar trees, just below the window, until now and then a spray of dying leaves shattered itself against the clear glass.

"I was mistaken," thought Dr. Knapp, as he looked at George's peaceful face resting on the pillow. "His story was long, and required an effort in the telling. He was much stronger than I thought." Rising he laid his hand on George's forehead. "Can you sleep now?" he asked, glancing at his watch.

"Oh no! don't leave me, Doctor," pleaded George; "I must have some one now to stay with me; I am afraid to be alone, for I think the end is near."

So the Doctor tried to make the poor sufferer as comfortable as possible, and resuming his seat, took both the white, wasted hands above the coverlet in his own, and talked long and earnestly.

The twilight faded and the lights came in. Soft footsteps passed sometimes along the hall, and once or twice a kind face looked in at the door; but the Doctor only gave directions for Lady Snowdrop's comfort, and still sat beside the little white bed where the dark-eyed stranger lay. Just through the open door he could look out into the dim corridor, with its light falling from the low clusters of lamps on the smooth, bright carpet, and shining beyond its borders on the waxed floor. George seemed to be looking at it too, for his eyes gazed steadily before him, but at last he glanced up into the Doctor's face. "I should like to [illegible] he said, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "I'd like [illegible] the old place again. Do you think it [illegible]

"O no; I'll lift you up if you like,—if you wish"; and the strong arms of the Doctor bore the wasted form over by the window, and parted the thick curtains. Twilight still lingered, but the evening lamps were lighted in the quiet streets. George sighed as he looked up and down, as if each feature of the scene recalled a thought of the past. His face was pale, and seemed each moment growing whiter, so the Doctor carried him back and laid him on the bed again.

"Ask Lois to forgive me," said George, sadly. "Say I remember her as the sweetest friend I ever knew. And when I am dead, let me be laid to sleep in the little cemetery in Locustville, and perhaps sometimes when she looks out of the windows of the red school-house on the hill, she will see the lonely graves in shadow of the stately church-steeple, and will stop to feel a thrill of her old tenderness for one wayward heart that moulders there."

Then followed a long, peaceful silence. The hours wore on, and George scarcely spoke or stirred, but his breath grew shorter, and his eyes more dark and bright. The subdued sounds out in the corridor grew less frequent, and finally ceased, save a faint rustle from some lonely watcher moving softly in the sleeping wards. Then suddenly George roused from his stupor, and held out his hand to the Doctor again. "You are my friend; stay with me," he said. "I'm afraid. I'm afraid to go alone without a friend."

"You have a Friend who goes with you everywhere," said the Doctor, kindly. "He is with you in the last hours. Trust in Him, my son; believe in Him, and He will save you."

"Do you think you can pray for me? I will trust then," said George, faintly. Reverently the Doctor's head was bowed, and the light above fell softly over its gray-brown waves, and over the black glossy curls on the pillow. Then the oppressive stillness was broken by a deep, low voice, bearing on its rich, steady tones a petition for mercy and forgiveness to the throne of grace. It brought strength and reconcilement, and at last peace; for when the Doctor raised his head, the spirit had flown.

Tenderly he straightened out the wasted limbs, turned the still form on its side to hide the scars, and brushed the damp hair from the pale forehead. The face had lost all its wild unrest, and looked smiling and reposeful, even boyish, in its stillness; and when a spray of late roses Nettie Hunman had laid above his pillow that day broke to pieces from some light brush, and let a few petals fall upon his head, the Doctor could not refrain from repeating softly to himself some little verses that came to his mind.

The rose's dainty branches just above him
  Shed creamy petals o'er his glossy hair,
As if the fragrant flowers still could love him
  Though false and cruel, yet so young and fair.

Death's pale, sweet angel cannot yet subdue him,
  For lingers still a flush upon his cheek,
As if the uncurbed passions that o'erthrew him
  Would from that silence in mute language speak, —

Would drive away the peace of death's cold finger
  That steals so slowly o'er his dreaming face,
And in defiance of that touch still linger,
  In death as well as life to lend their grace.

This man who lay before him, cut down in the bloom of his manhood, had fallen a victim to his own sins. And yet he had now atoned for all his guilt, and had left no room for aught but charitable thoughts. The Doctor looked reverently down upon the still form. He had been Lois's love. In those dark curls of hair, that handsome face, that calm, white brow, she had read a character replete with every manly attribute; she had trusted all her girlish faith and hope to him, and trusted to the last.

Fortune had bestowed many goodly gifts upon him. He had been talented, strong, able. There had been a grace and a magnetism about him that could win him scores of friends; there had been a refinement, a poetical vein, in his nature, which if blended with sincerity and upright purpose might have made his life magnificent in its grand achievement. Ah, what a pity those redeeming qualities had been squandered to satisfy a grasping, foolish vanity!

The Doctor sighed. Ah well! for Lois there might be something even better, something more glorious, than the blossoming of her first, sweet love. It must be all for the best.

And so he went softly away, told the watchers that death had passed, and then descended the broad stairway. He opened the wide hall door, and stopped for a breath of the damp freshness of the night air that rushed in.

The memory of Lois was inseparably associated with the mournful peace of that quiet place, and to-night it came back to him with a dull heartache, that still touched a minor chord of sweetness and longing in his

lonely home. How often he had stood there with her and watched the light that broke so suddenly upon her fair face, her pleasant blue eyes, her soft wavy brown hair! And now! The night she would not wear a pleasant face were she there to know. "And yet why linger with these mournful scenes?" he thought. "George, his life, his work, are things of the past; all is finished, and from this moment will forever be drifting farther and farther away on the receding shores of time." And as he went out into the cool night air, lo! all the sky was thick with midnight stars.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE DRIVE UP THE LEAFY GRADE.

True love 's the gift which God has given
To man alone beneath the heaven;
It is not fantasy's hot fire,
Whose wishes, soon as granted, fly;
It liveth not in fierce desire,
With dead desire it doth not die;
It is the secret sympathy,
The silver link, the silken tie,
Which heart to heart, and mind to mind,
In body and in soul can bind.

SCOTT.

NIGHT had come, one of those clear, cold nights when a dense blackness shuts around, when the winds are stilled, and all nature seems to hide herself for repose. Around the tall wayside house at Robinson's all sounds were hushed, save now and then a distant call from the sleepy calves in the barn-yard, or a rattle of the watch-dog's chain. In-doors, lights warm and brilliant glowed from the windows, and sent steady beams far out into the darkness, as if that pleasant home was overflowing with good cheer, and willingly parted with some of its brightness for the sake of lonely travellers out on the night-shadowed hills. In the pleasant parlor a glorious fire snapped and roared, sending its rich, yellow blaze from the pine logs high up the chimney, and picturing itself in playful sparkles on the liquid deeps of the window-glass. The room was large and square, filled

with plain, old-fashioned
make it very attractive and
long French windows
one side of the room.
the full curtains for
reflected in its clear
from the hearth-stone
side another group of
latticed court. Where
sat and enjoyed
the room were
mountains. — queer
of moss like
rich-hued birds
they looked as if
eyes. from
firelight flashed

Lois and the
room. Now and
ter of dishes
and sometimes
pressed laugh.
finishing their
story of
light. It
shrinking as
easy one.
Lois must
had deserved
hope which
How could
knowledge of

It was well that the pine knots on the hearth sometimes sputtered, and the bright light died down to a smouldering blaze half curtained in pitchy clouds of smoke, for the Doctor's face had spells of growing redder than even the warm fireside could make it, and his nervous hands twisted unconsciously the soft silk handkerchief with which he often wiped his face.

He began by telling Lois of George's death, intending to pass over it quickly, and to spare her feelings without revealing the fact that he knew her secret; but Lois stopped him often to ask questions, and finally began to tell him something of her story. She explained to him frankly, though in few words, that George had once been a very dear friend of hers, going through it all calmly, without any girlish blushes or hesitation, as if those old feelings had left no power to move her now. But when she came to relate the last sorrowful incidents, she paused. It was almost painful to tell the Doctor how cruelly she had been deceived. There was no need, however, to tell more, for he touched her arm as tenderly and caressingly as if she had been a little child, and told her not to revive those griefs; he knew, and sympathized with his whole heart.

Lois started slightly when he said this. "No, do not offer me sympathy now, Dr. Knapp," she said. "I do not need it. The memory which was once the holiest of my life perished utterly and ignobly at the last, and it has left no influence that could rouse me to feel either much pain or pleasure. There was a time, when I first learned how unworthy the object of my remembrance had been of all my tender thoughts, — then I suffered bitterly and sharply for a while. But it was

soon over. It was only the destruction of a sad memory, after all, not of a living, flourishing joy; and now there is only a cold, dead feeling left in its place, that can never disturb me again."

The Doctor made no comment, though inwardly he rejoiced to know that Lois had cast off a sorrow which would have deprived her of the happiest drams of life. He went on to explain George's confession, with some hesitation, knowing that the story he must relate would be full of surprises to Lois, involving one who had once been so near to her, and explaining events which had happened so close to her home.

"We must regard this as strictly confidential until matters have all been righted, — all made straight," he said. "My mission is a strange one, — something almost incredible, until I have proved its necessity by the letters which I have. I knew it would require my personal presence here, — I who heard the story with my own ears, and have means to assure myself that it was not the ravings of a dying man. I shall go up to Lucky Streak to see the superintendent, — taking care first to look around a little and make inquiries. I must ask a great many questions of you, Miss Warren. Shall you object?"

"Not if you are patient enough to answer all of mine. I am so shocked by what I have just heard, and yet so rejoiced for the sake of Edward and Mrs. Dennett, that I have no doubt my disturbed mind will give vent to its feelings by innumerable questions, and incessant talking about the matter."

But the Doctor after a little time took care to change the conversation to the scenes of Locustville. He re

lated all the news he could think of, and finally spoke of the Hunmans. Nettie, he said, was growing much more amiable. She brought him flowers, and did her work with a sweetness and quiet grace seemingly impossible to one so irritable as she had been. "There are many redeeming qualities in her character," he explained, "but they have always been hidden and crushed by the less pleasing ones. She has been a child,—a helpless plaything,—in the hands of a large family of older children,—for her uncles are little else in their own home. They have teased and worried her for their amusement until all her energies were bent toward defending herself, and her unformed character found no outlet to expand into anything broader and better. I saw the state of things at once. My first work was to encourage Nettie. I helped her a little by giving her something to do,—something with a reward for it, that would not be unwelcome drudgery. She was saucy and ungrateful at first, but gradually she grew to like me because I never opposed or worried her. Then I talked to her uncles a little, and we all tried together. But the wickedness of her nature seemed almost incorrigible for a long while, and the case all but hopeless,—all but lost. However, time at last brought about a change."

"But do you think it well to humor irritable people, Dr. Knapp?" asked Lois. "Does it not rather cultivate their selfishness and impatience?"

"Usually it does, I think," returned the Doctor. "But with Nettie the case was different. She is by nature rather proud, yet her pride was so utterly crushed that she went to the opposite extreme, and

became almost shameless in her ill nature. By allowing her a little chance to grow — to think — you see, she began to take an interest in making friends and presenting a lady-like appearance. We had just got her started on the right road, when something very encouraging came along to help us." The Doctor paused, but Lois waited for him to resume his little story, without a question. It was the first time he had ever spoken so about Nettie. How kind of him, she thought, to try to bring out the good in such an unlovely character! She remembered that morning when they had first met the snappish little girl in the old hospital, and the Doctor had borne her disrespectful sallies with calm patience. Ah, she knew the secret of it now!

And again she thought, with mortification, how she herself had been indifferent to poor Nettie, and at the last avoided and mistrusted her. Truly, the Doctor was most magnificently generous to discover the good under all that unpleasant exterior, and strive to cultivate it, even at the expense of his own comfort.

"Nettie found some one," continued Dr. Knapp, — "some one who encouraged her, not by kind indulgence, but by treatment which appealed to her pride. She will in time become very devoted and kind to her nearest friends, though I think she will never quite outgrow her lively temper when annoyed by others. She has not enough broad charity for that. As I was saying, this new friend praised and defended her, and in turn, of course, she showed lovely little graces that were very surprising. It was a most fortunate thing that she should find such a person, — ah-h, — in fact, that she should find such a beau."

"O dear!" said Lois, laughing merrily. "Then this friend was a beau. Who was he?"

"Rather who *is* he," said the Doctor, getting red. "He is now more than ever her friend."

"Well, then, who *is* he?" asked Lois, correcting herself.

"Er-r—Horace Graham."

"Horace Graham!" echoed Lois, opening her eyes wide in wonder. "I'm surprised. Is *he* a good, encouraging friend? I always thought him such a trifling, nonsense-loving fellow."

"So he is," replied the Doctor, "nonsense-loving, —and for that very reason he puts cross Nettie into a pleasant mood. He needs some one to lead him around, just as Nettie loves to do, and because he pleases her, she is pleasant and lady-like; because she shows a pleasant disposition, he in return is loyal,—attentive."

"I'm sure I'm very glad," said Lois, thoughtfully.

And after that they sat and mused over the strange things life brings to us; while the firelight flickered and died away into melting ash-drifts, and John came in to put another back-log on the smothered embers.

The Doctor prolonged his visit to the mountains for several days. There was much to be done, and Mr. Sevenoakes, sleek and careful as usual, was very reluctant to believe anything unfavorable about his friend Brooklyn. He was heartily glad, however, that Edward Dennett had been proved blameless; for notwithstanding the fact that personally he felt little interest in the young man, he recognized a good workman, one

whom he respected despite [illegible] had been obliged to make [illegible] trustworthy man for manager [illegible] securing Edward again.

Cautiously the little man and the [illegible] gated the case. Knowles [illegible] Streak, was interviewed and [illegible] vented by irrefutable proof [illegible] on being assured by his confessor that [illegible] been given the knowledge of the [illegible] secrecy, they would not divulge it [illegible] though the thoughtful [illegible] wretch's conscience for some [illegible] honesty.

Mr. Sevenoakes had not [illegible] and consequently felt [illegible] promise concealment [illegible] pleaded with him.

In justice to Edward [illegible] cerned, even Mr. Sevenoakes [illegible] of the fire should be made [illegible] tably as possible into an [illegible] Before taking the step, however, [illegible] that Mrs. Dennett should [illegible] and bethought himself of Lois as the messenger. The gentle little school-mistress was just the one to carry good tidings. She was so sympathetic and joyous-hearted; and besides, he had heard her speak so often in loving terms of Mrs. Dennett that he was sure she would be happy to do something for the dear friend of her early girlhood.

For two or three days the Doctor had made daily

trips up to Lucky Streak from Robinson's, and when on his return one evening he suggested that Lois accompany him next day on her kind mission, she was thoroughly delighted. She was greatly interested in the news of the Doctor's work, and now when she could share and help, she felt that she had heard the best news of all.

The Doctor cautioned Lois to rise early, and she playfully assured him that he would only be commencing his morning nap when she had shaken off the last dream of slumberland. And of course she was right. The household was always astir early; and since Dr. Knapp's advent into it, there was increased effort that everything might pass pleasantly and orderly for his sake.

John was agreeably surprised with Lois's medical friend, and even went so far as to admit to her that a certain pair of gloves were not really canary-tinted,—only a rich tan-yellow. He was never tired of examining Lady Snowdrop's fine black harness, which seemed so delicate, yet proved so strong and pretty besides, with its ivory rings and burnished buckles. The gig, and Lady Snowdrop herself, were equally objects for his wonder and admiration, and he felt that too much care could not possibly be bestowed upon them.

The girls, also, thought that Lois had certainly not overrated the Doctor's good qualities. At first they almost felt as if he was a godlike creature, too grand and noble to care for the material benefits of this world, and they felt at a loss to find some way to please him.

But when they discovered that he had an excellent appetite, and liked plenty of roast beef and plum pud-

ding, they were much relieved, feeling that there was one way in which they could show their appreciation, and hence they liked him all the better for it.

So of course no caution was necessary about the early rising. The girls were very particular to have the home pleasant and the breakfast tempting, and there was a general rush to make a pat of sweet, golden butter and the lightest biscuits possible, not to mention other choice things, for the table. Lois was up with the rest, busy getting ready for her early drive, and helping with the breakfast; but when the bell rang, and the Doctor did not appear, she stepped out into the porch to see if he had yet gone out to look after Lady Snowdrop.

"Why, what a good-looking man the Doctor is!" thought Lois, when she discovered him tying Lady Snowdrop to one of the long row of hitching-stakes, and covering her carefully with a blanket. He patted her smooth, snowy neck, and spoke kindly to her as he adjusted the halter again, quite unconscious that some one dearer to him than any other in the world was thinking what a pleasant picture she saw before her, of which he formed no inconsiderable part.

It was one of those bright, frosty mornings in autumn, when the air is sharp and clear and exhilarating, when the season seems to combine all the beauties of the year. There were the tender greenness and the fresh beauty of the spring; floods of rich, summery sunshine streaming through the trees, dispelling the shadows of the morning twilight, and converting beds of wet brown leaves into scales of burnished silver; there were the deep blue skies, and the damp, fresh,

earthy scents of winter; the white ice-gems melting from the trees, the roofs, and the sunless corners, the yellow, perishing vines, and the red-tipped, scanty leaves of autumn.

Out where the hard brown road broadened in its sweep up to the door was the shiny-wheeled black gig, the white horse, and the Doctor too, surrounded by a background of green forests of pine and fir, golden and sparkling in the sunlight and the frost, and the new growth of grass creeping up to the roadside, its bright, velvety greenness dotted here and there with showers of decaying brown or white-veined skeleton leaves. A cloud of steam arose with each breath from Lady Snowdrop's delicate pink nostrils, and several times she looked around appealingly at the Doctor, as if to request that he leave nothing undone which could contribute to her comfort. She was looking beautifully plump and fine that morning. No blemish marred the soft creaminess of her coat, and her bright, dark eyes, her arched neck covered with a flowing mane of crystal, wavy threads, and her little neat black hoofs impatiently stamping up layers of the crusted earth, all combined to make her a very handsome creature, —which the Doctor had once said was the only thing that could possibly excuse her indolence.

But the Doctor himself seemed most attractive to Lois. She smiled unconsciously to find herself thinking that Lady Snowdrop was no finer specimen of her kind than the Doctor of noble, perfect manhood. The thought seemed absurd, and yet she rather liked to indulge it. And there was, besides, a certain pleasure in seeing the odd little cart and the Doctor's familiar face making

a part of her old home scenes. Except her bright glimpses of the past summer, associated with pleasant drives through avenues of blossoming locust, all the rest of her life at Locustville had lost its power to move her feelings either to bliss or pain. And since the Doctor had somehow become blended with these scenes before her, she closed the book of her dead hopes and sorrows forever, without one mournful regret, and let the present, holding as it did all that her warm heart cherished, bring its full measure of delights, untinctured with any touch or remembrance of grief.

The Doctor, stepping about briskly to arrange the scarlet-lined robe over the broad seat, and to secure the reins, looked up and caught sight of Lois standing on the edge of the porch. She was dressed in a neat wool dress of gray, relieved by a bunch of rose-colored ribbon, which gave her flower-like face a softer, fairer bloom than it had ever worn before. He was pleased with the little surprise, and said good-naturedly, "So you are up with the sun this morning, Miss Warren. We shall have a fine drive — a glorious drive — through this keen, delicious air."

"Up *before* the sun, you should have said, Doctor," Lois answered. "I've been making biscuits, which naturally I am anxious to hear praised, so I came out to tell you that the breakfast-bell has already rung, and we have been wondering if you heard it."

"Thank you. I heard no echo of it," said the Doctor; "but I will be ready in a moment. I cannot afford to postpone very long the pleasure of trying one of your biscuits."

Lois laughed and ran into the house. Her heart was

lighter than it had been before for years, and her face, dimpled with smiles, was so bright that Milcie greeted her as she went into the dining-room with the remark that the country air was reviving her remarkably.

"Why, you can get an early breakfast as easily as I, who rise every morning in the year to do it. You don't look as if the indolence of the school-room has at all affected you."

Lois laughed as she poured the coffee, and welcomed the Doctor, coming in at that moment, with a pleasant glance of her soft blue eyes, which stirred his heart-strings just a trifle more than her glances usually did in those later days of his love.

Lois enjoyed the breakfast hour in her old home that cold autumn morning more than any other since her return. It seemed so pleasant to have the Doctor there filling up the home circle. He really was her best loved friend outside of her own people, she told herself; and then, besides, his presence, as it always did, sent a glow of kind feeling and happiness into her warm, generous heart, that was ever giving away its own sunlight to others. The dining-room was unusually cheerful, with the soft light coming through the frost-pictured windows, and falling over the bright, warm-hued carpet, and over the snowy table around which so many pleasant faces clustered. Savory scents of coffee made the room fragrant, and little puffs of white steam from Lois's flakey biscuits floated up and dissolved in the cool atmosphere.

John came in rubbing his hands, and took a seat by the Doctor, remarking that the cold, frosty air outside sent the blood coursing in warm currents even to the

tips of his fingers; while the Doctor, in sympathy, began rubbing his own hands too, and replied that he thought the weather rather frosty for a country that professed to be semi-tropical. "But then," he added, "your mountainous regions claim the right to indulge in ice and snow, I suppose."

"Yes," John answered, "the air is thin here, and the summits over in the east keep a perpetual supply of chilly weather to send us, should we get short."

"I almost envy you such mornings as this, though," said the Doctor, thoughtfully. "The sharp coldness is enough to wake up the dullest — ah-h, the sleepiest head. One could actually have dreams of empire, and all sorts of other glories, if he lived here very long, and rose each morning to drink in this cold, sweet, pine-steeped air, and to draw inspiration from these dark-clothed, majestic mountains that surround us."

"I'll venture to say you'd have dreams enough. We all do," replied John; "but the trouble here is, that our inconveniences are twofold more than yours in the lower country, so our dreams barely enable us to overcome the extra trouble we undergo by living here. That's the way our dreams vanish. We have nothing left after all but the pleasure they give."

Lois looked at John's rough, red hands as he said this, and compared them with the Doctor's, smooth and plump, that had lightened so many burdens for others, and yet to her seemed never to have had very heavy ones of their own to bear; she looked at John's honest, sun-browned face, and his old, worn clothes, and thinking of his hard, busy life, and how all the dreams of his early youth had given way to struggles and wor-

riments, a feeling of inexpressible tenderness toward him stirred in her heart. He looked hardly more than a boy, and yet his lot had been for many long years a very hard one. "How I wish I might do something to brighten dear John's life!" whispered a wish down in the deep recesses of her heart; and looking the next moment toward the Doctor, she felt that there she could find the answer to her wish. He sat with such a kindly look on his face, and seemed in such hearty sympathy with this home and the interests of those in it, she felt sure he would share her desire to make a touch of brightness in her dear brother's upright life. The Doctor was so strong and capable to her. She had somehow grown to submit her plans to him with more reliance on that strength and wisdom than even she herself knew.

Then her thoughts took a brighter phase. She fell to thinking how good he was to always show such generous compassion to others, when most likely the ways of his own life had led in pleasant places, and he could scarcely know from experience how to pity others. She little knew how his lonely, unselfish life had taught him to forget his own troubles, that other lives might be richer for the poverty of his.

She felt rather proud of him. She knew that her own people recognized his goodness; that they felt an admiration something akin to her own; and so she experienced almost a childlike pleasure in seeing them so solicitous for his comfort, and so ready to honor him in their simple way.

His behavior was always so full of deference and unobstrusive politeness, which were very delightful in spite

of his nervousness, that she felt sure his presence infused a charm into every heart within reach of its influence.

He sat talking lightly with John about the mountain districts, expressing his surprise over the beauty of the scenery, and the wild, pristine glory of a region that had borne the tread of many thousand feet and the blows of many thousand picks. His face lighted up with enthusiasm as he spoke of his love for the mountains; and Lois thought again that it was indeed strange she had never before discovered that the Doctor was almost handsome. "But then," she mused, "it must be that his retiring disposition keeps one from thinking much about his personal appearance. Besides, he is so good, one sees only the kindness in his face, without looking for anything less pleasing."

And then she vaguely wondered how she ever could have thought the Doctor old. He certainly looked young that morning, although his brown, curling hair, parted so evenly in a narrow white line above his broad forehead, showed many silver threads in its glossy waves. But his clear gray eyes beamed with a youthful frankness, and his calm face, slightly flushed, looked so beneficent and serene, so free from all traces of bitterness or discontent, that she felt sure the generous charity shining through it issued from the sweet, perpetual spring-time of his heart. There was a certain purity about him that all felt,—the sure inheritance of a life well lived, of wisdom discreetly gathered from the best experiences of the past.

Lois grew almost enthusiastic in her admiration of the Doctor, and so quite forgot to eat her breakfast, un-

til reminded of it by him. "You must remember this air sharpens the appetite, and you will wish for another breakfast before we have driven a mile,— at Lady Snowdrop's pace," he added, with a sly twinkle of his eye.

So Lois checked her pleasant train of thought, and finished her meal without indulging it further. In the hurry that followed her preparation to start, she was scarcely reminded of the Doctor, until the girls had all assembled in the porch to see her off, and stood giving her dress sly little pulls to adjust some wrinkled fold, and pinning at her throat the late blossoms of a pink geranium which grew in a sheltered corner of the porch.

"Come, Lois," said the Doctor, fastening Lady Snowdrop's check-rein in its place after she had refused the cold water of the brimming tank, and Lois with a little start and a faint blush went down the steps to be helped into the gig, with her mind so confused she scarcely realized what had happened until the Doctor was seated beside her and they were starting away.

"I may call you Lois, may I not, when we are here in your old home among your own people who call you by that name?" asked the Doctor, as they drove away amid the chorus of good-bys from the porch; and he looked down upon the fair face beside him with a protecting tenderness beaming from his kind gray eyes.

"Why, yes; I 'd rather have you. It is less formal, and so much more friendly," Lois replied. "But he need n't be quite so *fatherly* about it," she added mentally, as she remembered with a touch of indignation the look that accompanied his request. "There is n't so very much difference in our ages, that he can think me a mere child compared to him."

[illegible]

"I always like to come through the woods in autumn, when the leaves are turning red," he remarked at length as they passed out of the sunlight and the open road under the dark canopy of shadow from the [illegible] trees. "The many scenes from the decaying leaves under foot, and the soft glory of the gold and crimson foliage lighting up the sombreness of the dim vistas, have a power to recall my boyhood more vividly than anything else."

There was always something so dreamy, so full of gentle feeling, about the Doctor,—something which appealed as tenderly to a kindred chord in others that Lois quite forgave him for that glance as he said this, and forgot it almost while indulging that strange sympathy we feel toward those who turn back fondly in remembrance to their early home.

"We are almost too late for the full beauty of the fall," she answered. "I like best to see the trees before any of the bright leaves have fallen. Still, there is color enough left, though the winds have almost stripped the boughs. See that red leaf, glowing in the sun! It is like a ruby covered with a dewy shower of diamond dust. We can take the lower grade, that winds along the hill just above the creek, if you want to enjoy the fullest glory of the autumn in the mountains. It seems much prettier to me than the travelled stage-route, for the roadside is uncleared, and of course

the trees grow thicker near the water. Besides, it is associated with the pleasant drives I used to take in my childhood up to Mrs. Dennett's, when the old town was in its prime. The upper grade was not built then, and all this country was in the full flush of its first excitement, very unlike the dull lethargy that has settled over it now, which scarcely seems disturbed by the opening of a new era of prosperity."

"The lower road, by all means, must be chosen, if the solitude is deeper there," said the Doctor. "We must not allow the least suggestion of the outer world to mar the peaceful quiet of this perfect day."

Then they talked a while about the changing leaves, and Dr. Knapp told Lois of the maples of New England; how the fall dressed all the forests in robes of buff and russet-gold and crimson, and the brown burs opened to let out their treasures; and how he and his brother spent many hours of the purple autumn weather ranging the gorgeous woods in search of their store of Christmas nuts.

It was not the first time he had recalled his New England home that morning. His thoughts had been busy at breakfast time, in a deep undercurrent, through all his cheerful talk. The frosty windows, and the inspiration of the home life all around him, had somehow touched a chord of his being that had not vibrated so fully or so strongly since the halcyon days of his boyhood. To be one of that charmed circle, to feel instinctively that he had a little share of the inner riches of its love, to be near Lois, and to see her cheerful once again, opened a vein of happiness as rare as it was blissful.

But still in that fond returning to his youth, and to the influence of his childhood's home, he realized there was another feeling,—something deeper and more joyous, which not only heightened his pleasure in the restoration of those by-gone days, but held a charm, a power of its own, stirring him with a rapture he scarcely dared indulge. It made his heart even tremble, lest he should forget the hard lot fate had meted out to him, and which he had resolved to accept without complaining, and so give way to that nameless ecstacy until too late to save himself from the despairing misery that would follow its inevitable flight. And yet there was an exhilaration that rose up through all his sad forebodings, through all his settled griefs, and like the spirit of his dead happiness resurrected, pleaded with unconquerable earnestness for just that one short season of renewal. He could not long resist the delight that possessed him; it allayed his fears, and lifted him up into that fair, enchanted region, where the world's dull commonplaces, its strivings and its wearing sorrows, have no part.

And so, as they drove along, he and Lois together, on that matchless October day, over the quiet, leaf-lined road that led around the hillsides in odd and devious windings, he felt that earth was nearer heaven than he had ever realized before; he even allowed himself to fancy that the life which he had left behind was cleansed of everything but sweet and spotless memories, and the way before him borrowed more and more of the beauties of elysian fields, till it ended at the gate of Paradise.

The sunshine fell in warm, golden showers through the pines, and turned the white frost-crystals into diamond drops of dew; while above them, on the vine-grown bank overhanging the road, or below them, where the wild nests of bushes choked up the cañon through which the clear stream roared, autumn's mellow glories were displayed in yellow, dying sprays, trembling above the brownness of the naked earth, and flame-red leaf-tongues flashing forth from hollow-hearted tangles each moment as they passed along. The ferns, old and brittle, leaned out of their rocky crevices, and flaunted threads of gossamer from their half-crushed silvery fronds; and the squirrels, with soft bright eyes and plumy coats of short gray fur, flitted about quickly through the fallen leaves, and left the imprint of their sharp toes in the damp red soil of the road as they ran across to take refuge in their sheltered holes beneath the rocks. Sometimes a leaf fluttered down from the canopy of vine-mantled trees leaning above the way, and lodged in Lady Snowdrop's tossing mane, or slipped to the ground after a brief stay on her plump, sleek back; and now and then on the still, keen air rang out the distant call of some wild bird from the echoing woods.

No word profaned the golden silence, until Lois, returning to her thoughts at breakfast time, deemed it a fitting season to ask the Doctor what she could do for John. She had been thinking, too. And like the Doctor, she had indulged in day-dreams that brought her memories rare and beautiful. That old graded road, leading along the mountain-side through the very heart of the wild woods, had seemed to relapse into the

calm, primeval beauty that had haunted it long ago, and renewed her cherished, unchangeable pictures of the past. And yet she could not forget something that troubled her, though she hardly dared admit it to herself. She shrank from the loneliness she knew would return to her when the Doctor went back to Locustville; and yet she told herself that she must stifle that strange dread that came over her, as something hardly usual in friendship such as hers. But the dread would not be stifled, so she resolved to talk of something that would tend to relieve her mind.

"Dr. Knapp," she said, suddenly, "I was thinking of John this morning,—thinking how much I would like to do something to make more pleasant his hard life. He has always been such a good boy,—so faithful and willing. You can scarcely understand just how good, because his trials and hardships have been of a kind of which you know nothing. And I resolved to talk with you about it, because your suggestions are always so valuable to me."

"Ah! So we have both been thinking of John, I see," replied the Doctor. "I am sure he has been a kind, faithful brother. But I am ahead of you in my plans, and so, perhaps, you will allow me to finish it for you — in your name. During my talks with Mr. Sevenoakes I discovered that there was a fine opening for some one in connection with the mine, so I immediately thought of John. It will enable him to get help to fill his place at home, and give him besides a very fair start in life. I intended to settle the matter to-day, and if favorable to my wishes, to consult John himself about his ideas of the plan. I scarcely have a

doubt but that he will be able to get it, for Mr. Sevenoakes has been much troubled with unfaithful workmen, even since the fire."

"Oh, Dr. Knapp!" said Lois, quite overcome with gratitude. "It was so good of you! I hardly know how to express my thanks. You have always been more than kind to me, Dr. Knapp; and I have often wished, — oh, so very much! — that I could do something in return. And though I feel wholly powerless to do anything commensurate with the debt of gratitude I owe, if there is ever anything I can do, will you give me the pleasure I shall feel in performing it, by telling me what it is?"

The Doctor looked wistfully away toward the rugged hillside beyond the cañon. He hardly dared trust himself to speak in answer to such words while the tender thoughts and the enchantment of the lovely scenes around him filled his heart. And then suddenly all reserve deserted him, and he resolved, let come what might thereafter, he would unburden some of the overflowing affection of his soul.

"My sweet friend," he said, "do not ask me that. You have already done more for me than any one else in the world. You have shown me a glimpse of a life more pure and true and lovely than I ever dreamed of. You have made me realize that in this delusive world all our fond fancies do not end in disappointments — in regrets; that there are heights of delight which have their foundations in the firm and everlasting rocks, and their summits above the frowning clouds in the blue, untroubled fields of heaven. This you have done for me when the innocent faith of early life had perished,

and had left me hopelessly striving to do my appointed work in a world that held none of its choicest blessings for me. I have felt this often since I first knew you. You have made my life far richer — far better than it ever was before; and though I regretfully realize that only stray touches of the sunshine you bestow can fall on me, — that your chosen path lies far from mine, — yet I long to have a little place in your heart, which you will keep for me alone, and will feel it is filled by a friend whose best and only happiness lies in knowing and serving you."

Lois sat like one stunned while the Doctor spoke. Though usually calm and self-possessed, she sometimes had moments when all her confidence deserted her; though practical, there was still a deep vein of sentiment in her character that thrilled with its pensive beauty every purpose and action of her life, and rose up at times supreme over every other feeling. And so when he who had always seemed so far above her, wrapped in his cloak of experience and wisdom, looking down upon her — though she hardly liked to have him do it — from that calm, disinterested plane of fatherly friendship, when he declared to her what a great part she held in his feelings and life, she simply covered her face with both her hands, and had no word to say.

There was just a moment of silence between them, which seemed almost endless to Lois, who remained with her hands before her eyes, listening as if in a dream, in spite of the tumult of her thoughts, to the sharp clatter of Lady Snowdrop's hoofs on the hard road, sounding far away and indistinct to her, and

feeling a cool zephyr, freighted with the shrill, sad whispers of the pine trees, blow against her cheek, and then die away with soft, low rustles in the leaves. But she quickly raised her face, revealing the slightest sparkle of a tear upon her eyelashes, which she made an unsuccessful effort to conceal, saying, with just a suggestion of unsteadiness in her voice, "You have already a place in my heart, Dr. Knapp; it surely must be needless for me to tell you that. I know too well what it is to have false friends not to appreciate and welcome the true. Bitter experiences have taught me that. The false are soon forgotten; they are almost obliterated from the memory, and hold no place in the affections. But I know that you are a true friend to me, because you are a true friend to every one. And that is the reason why I spoke as I did, — about making you some return for your kind friendship."

"My reward has already been received, as I told you," said the Doctor, still speaking with unusual fervor, and wholly without his native reserve. "What more can I ask? I understand fully what a small portion of your thoughts belongs to me, and yet, if you will let me, I will make it my greatest aim to shield you and protect you through every trial in life. I will not force my friendship upon you when others are more welcome. I only ask the privilege to offer you a constant refuge in my friendship if you should ever want it — ever need it; for, Lois, strive to conceal the fact as I may, it will not remain hidden, — I care more for you than you can ever know. When first I knew you I dared indulge the strange, new joy your presence brought me, scarcely realizing what it meant. But there came a

day when my foolishness was forced upon me, and I awoke to recognize my true position. Still, I could not cast aside your influence, and so I found my solace in wishing for you all the sweetest blessings life can bring, and hoping perhaps in some way I could be instrumental in bringing good to you by feeling toward you as I did. And hence, though I am old compared to you, though my feelings may scarcely interest you now, because my life has been as true and earnest as I could make it amidst many sorrows, I ask you to consider me worthy to be your friend. And, Lois, when our paths shall lead apart, and by you all our old associations shall be quite forgotten, if by some careless reminder you ever think of me, know that your bright image will lie enshrined in my heart as unchangeable as the solid rock. Then won't you stop to feel a thrill of pity for me, — will you not send me some little message of remembrance?"

He had entirely broken away from his old sensitive shyness, he had far overstepped the bounds of what he had meant to say, and had poured out his whole heart as if he could not bear to leave one feeling unexpressed, until checked by a glance at Lois. Her face was covered with her hands again, and she seemed to be trembling.

"Forgive me," he said softly, leaning over her. "I did not intend to grieve you, Lois. I little thought that I should so far forget myself as to offend you with such a recital of my feelings — of my thoughts. But I shall go away to-morrow, and if my hope of seeing you again is sometime realized, try to forget this grave mistake which I have made, and think of me as if it

had never been. Don't you think you can forgive me, Lois?"

"I have nothing to forgive," she answered, looking up, and yet trying to hide the traces of tears on her face. She felt mortally ashamed of them, confused, and troubled. How absurd of her, she thought, to show so much emotion, — she who always knew so well how to meet emergencies!

"I am not displeased with what you have said," she went on. "On the contrary, I thank you very much for your kind thoughts of me. Do not feel that they are not appreciated, — only I cannot tell you — I do not want you to go away with the idea that you have offended me. You certainly have not."

"Thank you for that," he said, almost sadly. And yet he was wondering why Lois, usually so undisturbed, so bright and strong-hearted, allowed her eyes to be dimmed by tears because of his agitation, — why she did not, by a few calm words, in her own kind way, administer a timely reproof to him for his rashness, and set things on their old familiar basis again. A bright hope sprang into life with the thought.

Why should he not say all, when he had already said so much? Perhaps thereby he could enable her to regain her self-command, and she would answer him with her natural tranquillity, would talk to him in her gentle way, and soothe his wounded heart; and perhaps in what she said he might find some word, some touch of tenderness, to last him all the coming years; and then perhaps — perhaps — ah! the simple thought wrapped him again in that uncontrollable ecstacy that made him fearless in his hopes.

"I am more than happy that I have not displeased you, Lois," he said. "It would be almost an unbearable pain to go away feeling that by my hasty conduct I had forfeited what little claim I held upon your friendship — your esteem. That would deprive me of the best joy I have, — the pleasure of being near you." He paused, and then, an almost audacious hope springing into life at that moment, he asked, "Won't you allow me to love you, and live my life near yours, dear Lois?"

Softly and timidly, very unlike the bright, self-reliant Lois of old, came the answer, "Yes"; and somehow the Doctor understood it, — understood that it was meant to satisfy, not only his modest question of words, but the great unexpressed question of his soul, — that it removed all misunderstandings, and linked their lives together forever after.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### EDWARD DENNETT'S FORTUNES.

**Disgrace does not consist in the punishment, but in the crime. — ALFIERI.**

**There is a pleasure sure**
**In being mad, which none but madmen know.**
**DRYDEN.**

LET us journey far across the blue, tossing ocean, to a foreign land, where Edward Dennett has taken refuge from the sorrows that have tortured his lacerated heart. It is a wild country, vast and beautiful; but alas, how unlike his native shore! There are strange people in its crowded cities on the seaboard, swarthy natives from the island districts, rough herders, and excited miners, sturdy, progressive Englishmen, highly satisfied because they are on "Her Majesty's soil," broad-faced Hollanders, and a few Americans.

What can a young man bred as a liberal-minded American do in such a strange world? Life in the cities could bring him no profit, and so the broad miles of inland country must yield him the occupation which will help him to forget his woes, and the strange land around him. And again, what is more inviting than the wild, free woods, which somehow vaguely remind him of his own native forests of pine?

At first he tried the mining districts, but the work was more than distastful to his fine nature. It was in the latter part of October and early in November when

Edward arrived, and mining [illegible] largely discontinued on account [illegible] that his occupation was [illegible] his associates were rough [illegible] edge of local mining, and [illegible] ordinate position while earning [illegible] daily bread. It was at this [illegible] of his exile, that he received [illegible] It had been written shortly after [illegible] arrived on the steamer that [illegible] were many comforting [illegible] gentle advice, but it held [illegible] ever join him in his new [illegible]

"I cannot bear to think [illegible]" she wrote. "I am growing [illegible] home which has been mine [illegible] spot on earth where I could [illegible] I do not mind the new position [illegible] it is only for your sake I [illegible] self that your misfortune has [illegible] I shall ever live in the strongest hope that your name will be cleansed of all disgrace and that you will some time come back to me, my dear son, and to this old home where the bright years of your childhood were passed. Be brave, be strong, and wait. It will surely come." Edward could not suppress a sigh. He loved his mother very tenderly, and keenly felt the disappointment of his hope to see her kindly face in his utter loneliness. But then the thought came to him of his poor mother severing the ties which a quarter of a century had formed around her home, and the utter aimlessness of her life in a foreign land; and he bravely said

to himself, "She is right; this is no place for her in her declining years." At the last there had been a touch of joy for him. It was Mabel's message. Mrs. Dennett carefully wrote every word of comfort she could call to mind, in her description of Mabel's departure, and at last described the farewell at the gate, and Mabel's parting words,—"Tell him when at last he reaches home my love will be waiting for him there." Strong man that he was, the letter fluttered from his grasp. He could never more think of an earthly home, he could never expect to look into Mabel's face again. Ah! could he do his part without one struggle to obtain those earthly comforts, devoid of which the smoothest path through life is hard indeed?

For a time that thought of Mabel sustained him. In untiring toil he wore away the sharpness of his trouble, taking a strange comfort out of the vague, shadowy hope of the fulfilment of his dreams in another world. It was well for him that such a stray wave of comfort tided him over the most treacherous rocks of his voyage. After a time he grew accustomed to his work and surroundings and hopeless loneliness, and he could look with clearer vision into his future years, and feel somewhat reconciled to the cruel fate that so tortured him.

His adversities should not altogether discourage him; bereft of home and friends, an exile to a foreign country, where every face that looked into his seemed strange and cold, there was still something left for him to do. He was a man still,—let them call him fiend as they would; and he had a work before him, a long life to use for the sake of that mother far away,

for the sake of that dear friend whom [illegible] hope to see again. He must live [illegible] ory. Out of a new life and [illegible] must fashion his path, bearing [illegible] couragements if they met him, [illegible] ward to win at least the reward [illegible]

Fortune favored him after a month [illegible] mines. He fell in with a party of [illegible] an opportunity to change his [illegible] their labors. But their pursuit [illegible] wild, unsettled districts, so that although Edward [illegible] that his lot was growing better [illegible] advantage, he could receive no [illegible] home. Their constant [illegible] made it very uncertain when [illegible] sent, and Edward found [illegible] the mines, where his mail had been [illegible] every touch of civilization, [illegible] mother. But he never received a letter from [illegible] anxious messages.

The days slipped by, and still he patiently hoped and waited for the long-delayed news that would make like a picture of another life [illegible]

But time had made him strong to bear his hardships, and it was well for him, for after the elapse of two or three months there came another trial, more severe than all, in which his new strength served him well. It came in the form of an artful letter from Nellie Minton, which by some chance had reached him. She had obtained his address by a little stratagem practised on his mother, and could not resist the desire to write to him, offering her sympathy and regret for his ban-

ishment. There were divers hints about the fire, and little pleasantries which made his heart a good deal lighter, until he reached the part where she had attempted to write him a word of news. He wondered blindly, as he read it, how that terrible intelligence could be written in the same careful, lady-like hand as other parts of the letter; why it was that a hand which could send him such a cruel blow did not tremble slightly, out of pity for his pain. George was dead, she had learned from friends in Locustville, who were slightly agitated over the occurrence. She had not heard anything further about it,—not even the cause of his death. Edward shuddered as he read the line.

Alas that George, who had been his bitterest foe, should end his career and leave his victim suffering still, when all earth's allurements perish with the closing of the grave! It seemed hard indeed to Edward. What purpose did it serve to George that his victim should always bear the condemnation of his own wrong?

He continued with his letter, only to find something more bitter still. "I presume you have not heard much from Mabel since she left Lucky Streak," Nellie wrote. "Neither have I. She seems to have forgotten her old friends, by such long silence; but then, you know, mamma and I live so quietly here in our home in the city that perhaps we do not seem quite fashionable enough to suit her tastes. Her aunt is very ambitious for her. Since their return I have heard that they undertook a journey to the East on some society call or other. And of course Mabel is happy; for notwithstanding their severe losses of property in the past

year the report is spreading that she has succeeded in securing a very wealthy suitor. [illegible] strange. She is a very pretty girl, and has always strive to use their personal advantages for their advancement. For my part, I am [illegible] hear it. She was not a girl who could [illegible] of any description, although she was [illegible] think so when it first threatened [illegible] this time you have ceased to think of her [illegible] me, if by this I seem to be arranging [illegible] affairs, but of course, being a friend [illegible] friend—of both of you. I must not [illegible] course of matters. Manet is at heart a very good sweet girl, but she is human, not [illegible] seemed to think her once. She [illegible] she never expected to see you again, and [illegible] aunt's influence, better explains [illegible] forgot you. There was no use clinging to a [illegible] ment, when the joys of life were [illegible] hand. Of course we cannot blame her [illegible] chose a future of ease and comfort to the prospect of nursing a memory in obscurity. If you had been prosperous, her fancy for you might have continued; as it is, the frail thing perished, and another springs up. Such a girl as she must live in sunshine; there is no such thing as gloominess to her bright nature. It should not matter so much if her sentiments are fleeting; they are pleasant for the time. After she is gone, one sees how shallow they were, and yet escapes the sting they might have left, because they were so short-lived. Her prospective future is the best possible one for her; a rich husband, such as her betrothed will

make, cares most for a pretty wife, and if her fancy is only light, he can renew it every time he buys her a little present, or humors her in some simple, girlish whim.

"The wedding is to take place in the spring, — in March, I understand. One hears so many reports about such a thing, I really do not know whether I ought to forbear to tell you that Mabel is extremely happy, and has declared her brightest hopes fulfilled in the affection of the man she has chosen.

"All this I have written, feeling quite assured that your admiration for her has so diminished with time that you have come to realize her character better, and will rejoice over her good fortune. I am sure I should, if it were only for gratitude, because she accompanied me to Lucky Streak last summer, where I passed one of the most pleasurable seasons of my life, among my old-time friends and the scenes of my childhood.

"I cannot help expressing the satisfaction I feel in hearing that you will soon return home, because of my love for your mother and my friendship for yourself. I am greatly rejoiced to hear that your troubles are over."

With the reading of that letter Edward's comfort and trust in Mabel's affection perished in spite of himself. He felt assured that Nellie was striving, for some reason or other, to poison his mind against Mabel, and yet she certainly must have truthfully reported Mabel's expected marriage. Nellie was too cunning ever to manufacture such a thing without a foundation of truth. If Mabel could forget him in a

few short months, and their mutual promises of mending affection, or if she could marry without loving her husband, he felt that he had been sadly mistaken in her. The scales seemed to fall from his eyes. At the first he had not dared to trust her. Alas! love had made him blind,—totally blind, until too late to save himself!

But there had been something in Nellie's missive which was very perplexing. He could not comprehend why she had referred to his visit home, when he had never hoped for such a thing. He did not know that the good news which had never reached him was already old to Nellie, or that her letter would never have been written but for his good fortune. He could not surmise that she had grossly exaggerated an uncertain report concerning Mabel, to serve immediately her own schemes. After vainly studying over it, he concluded to let the matter rest.

Ah! those weary days that followed! Edward scarcely realized how much hope he had placed in Mabel's love until he had to give it up. All through his hardest struggles it had sustained and cheered him. But he had now no sweet and unsullied memories, except those of his mother.

After a few more weeks of waiting and suspense, Edward at length decided to start for one of the large cities on the coast, and there await his mother's answer, which he had requested should be directed there. He felt that she was all he had left,—only one, his dear mother, remained true to her poor, unfortunate boy. He clung to the solace which that love gave him with a desperation akin to madness.

**On his way to the city he went to the mining camp where he had first found employment. There, in the dingy little office, the postmaster handed him a foreign letter, which made his heart beat wildly with both hope and fear. It was from his mother, and she was well, he hastily gleaned as he opened it, and then he more calmly read the letter.**

MY DEAR SON EDWARD, —

Your constant letters bring me comfort, but since I have been hoping for your return, the weeks are endless, and each day closes in a bitter disappointment because you have not arrived. Pardon my impatience. It results from the longing of a mother's heart.

My yearning breast schools itself to quietness by the consciousness of your comparative comfort during the few remaining days which you must spend in exile, for the first letter that reaches you will tell you of your good fortune.

My son, I cannot forbear thinking that some of those letters with their "tidings of great joy" must have been received, and that you are even now homeward bound. The proof of your innocence all came about through our dear little friend, Lois Warren. A friend of hers, Dr. Knapp, has charge of the hospital at Tenayee, where George Brooklyn took refuge; for he was terribly burned that night of the fire, and besides, as the result of his wounds and the exposure to which he was subjected while making his escape from Lucky Streak, he contracted a fever which proved fatal. It seems that he was once an admirer of Lois, and Dr. Knapp, being Lois's warm friend, took an unusual interest in him. Thus it came about that he made a dying confession of his guilt to the Doctor, since he committed the crime for which you have been so cruelly banished. He gave Dr. Knapp papers which substantiate your innocence, but I dare not send them for fear of their miscarriage. But come home and receive these precious documents from the hand of your mother, and read your welcome in the faces of all your old friends.

I am going to tell you some news. A queer little cart, drawn slowly along by a pretty cream-white horse, stopped before our door one afternoon, and I was surprised to see the same bright little Lois of long ago spring out, assisted by a stout, dignified personage whom

she introduced as Dr. Knapp. They broke the joyful news they brought me with studied delicacy. The Doctor has such a kind face and manner that I was glad to see the warmest friendship existed between them, and when he told me that Lois had only that morning promised to become his wife, we all had reason to rejoice together. Practical, energetic little Lois blushed like a rose when I kissed her, after my congratulations to the Doctor, and this explained the soft brightness of her bluebell eyes, which usually are so merry and shrewd, you recollect.

They stayed to dinner, but I could not prevail upon them to make me a longer visit, so they drove off again about sunset. I suppose the prospect of a long moonlight drive was too tempting under the circumstances. They were going clear down to Robinson's, — for Lois was home several weeks on a visit. I shall never forget her little farewell wave of the hand, as she smiled back at me in the rich golden glow of the waning light. She is a sweet girl, Edward, one whom I have long loved. Her frequent visits here before she went to teaching were a great delight to me, as you know. But I had almost grown reconciled to her absence when Mabel Willis came, though I fear Mabel, with all her charming ways, has not the deep feeling and constancy which make Lois such a blessing to all who love her.

I have not received a line from Mabel since she left. Still, remembering her sweet, artless ways, we will not think ill of her. Her aunt may have been displeased, and you know it would be unwise to scorn the opportunities the world offers to one so fair as Mabel.

In Mrs. Dennett's letter there was a brief account of an occurrence which merits a fuller description.

Ever since Edward Dennett's departure, trusty, faithful, old Mike Logan had been over to see to things at the Dennett place every day, after his work-hours at the mine, and his watchful care extended to the exhausted claim of the Golden Deep. When opportunity permitted, Mr. Logan would wend his way over the quiet hills to this lonely retreat, and spend hours in

the dark, silent rooms where the rusting machinery and gloomy solitude spoke to him in a welcome language of the half-forgotten past. He was given to brooding, in those days, over his lost Nita, and the hopeless loneliness and desertion of these once busy scenes seemed in accord with his grief.

One day as he passed the old town on his way he caught sight of a latticed arbor with its falling rafters entwined by a luxurious climbing rose running wild and rank in its unregarded growth over the decaying supports. A vision of Nita in her babyhood, which seemed to him but yesterday, holding out her tiny hands for clusters of the same bright flowers that were budding out so crisply now, came before his eyes, and made them dim with sorrow.

Hastily he turned his back upon the place to control his grief. What would he have thought could he have known that beneath that vine in the moisture rusted the small, glittering dagger which she had dropped when the fierce purpose of a blind vengeance had been subdued by Mabel's tears?

The dash of fire and restless ambition in Nita's character had always been a blank to her father; and even her husband, John Gloucester, never fully comprehended it. He had become a son to Mike Logan, who learned to love his daughter's husband for her sake. The young man had wept with deep sorrow for her loss, and to her reported errors his ear was almost deaf, for his heart was still clinging to the romantic attachment he had formed for her, and he excused every fault on the ground of youth and childish innocence. So it was, to those who loved her, that

the memory of poor, unfortunate Nita [illegible] fume like the rare fragrance that [illegible] brilliant wild roses.

On this quiet sabbath morning [illegible] the poor fellow wandered [illegible] and after making his usual [illegible] on an old pile of crumbling [illegible] It was a perfect day, just when the [illegible] and flowers seemed [illegible] that grow warm with [illegible] more contented and happ[illegible] a day. His thoughts [illegible] lost Nita, returned [illegible] in its glory, and that [illegible] mill looked to him [illegible] morning to his work [illegible] wealth beneath [illegible] how suddenly the [illegible] the mine had been found.

He was [illegible] weather-beaten [illegible] yond, and with [illegible] the sound of [illegible] appeared [illegible] walls of the [illegible] his original [illegible] mouth, and [illegible] bright in the [illegible] and along the [illegible] at once that [illegible] rose that [illegible]

After considerable speculation about earthquakes and the explosion of gases, he at last concluded that it must have been caused by the caving of one of the inclines, and later on he felt an uncontrollable curiosity to pry into the secret.

He started for Lucky Streak, where he told his story to the crowds of idlers in the saloons, but it only excited loud bursts of laughter from the incredulous miners, who attributed the sound to some blast from a neighboring mine. At last, after he had interrupted the interest in the games of cards, he prevailed upon a dozen or more of the miners to go. They set out well provided with ropes and chains for the repair of the cage at the mine, but afternoon had begun to cast its shadows over the eastward slopes of the pine-wrapped hills before they had ascertained that the old machinery was in perfect working order.

When all was in readiness, four men, Logan among them, took their places in the cage, and were slowly lowered into the well-like winze of the mine. At every foot of the descent a pause was made, until a shout from the men gave the order to go ahead. It was a dangerous piece of work, they all knew, for another explosion might occur, or the walls might bury them under crumbling heaps of earth and rock, and they who worked the machinery at the top looked down with feelings of awe and wonder upon the flickering torches that made weird shadows around the little party far below in the deep shaft.

At length a shout from the dim underground cave called "Halt," and the men had reached the first level. As Logan sprang out of the cage, he stumbled over a little mound of rocks, from the top of which a small

pocket-book fell. He picked it up, examined it to find that it was closely written inside with lead-pencil, and placed it in his pocket unnoticed. After a few precautions, and experiments for cross-currents with their torches, the other men started boldly off on a tour of investigation, singing gayly a queer old song, that answered back in soft musical echoes from every passage-way and drift.

They were fearless fellows who worked underground at Lucky Streak, and felt no fear of earthy rooms; while Logan was a new hand whose experience was limited in such matters, so his nerves were quite unstrung for a time, and he continually gave warnings to the others about being too venturesome. "I'll be hanged if I don't smell powder," said one miner, a middle-aged man, sniffing the air, and cautiously peering about. "I wonder if there hain't been an explosion. I once hearn old man Dennett say,—peace to his ashes! he was n't much like the bad weed of that name who follered him,—he once told me that a big lot of gunpowder was left in here after the closing of the mine. It was said to be damaged, and they did n't have no use for it, so they left it be. I recollect it, because a lot of us had a notion of taking it for ourselves, but we finally gave it up."

"Drat my heart! I smell it, too," said another, growing more excited. "We 'd better wheel in and get the cage ready to go back. There might be a right smart of that thar stuff here that 'll blaze away afore we get out, anyway."

"Be aisy, boys!" said Logan. "Yez nadent be in such a rush. We 'll go slow, and foind the thing now we 're down."

Into the long, dark drifts the red light of the smoking torches pierced, resting now a moment on some brown, damp, jutting rock, then sparkling in fitful ripples on the black water pools underfoot, or glancing along some swollen timber or broken pipe. The miners at last grew discouraged in their slow, toilsome search, and only groped carefully about, looking part way into the musty drifts, from which even the damp, poisoned air seemed almost exhausted, and always keeping near the cage, till Logan, frightened and inexperienced as he was, in his eager desire to fathom the mystery, felt compelled to take the lead.

At length, over on one side of the mine, he discovered a dark passage-way, which looked at a distance as if it had been filled up with dirt and rubbish. On going nearer, and steadying as much as possible the flickering flame of his torch, he could see that a heavy clod was slowly rolling down the side of the earth mound, and that a sprinkling of fresh dirt covered the ground around him. Carefully he ventured forward toward the mysterious corner, calling to his companions to follow him, until at last he stood near the passage-way, where the walls had been ploughed into a mass of moist, powdered earth, where a ledge cropping out of the wall was crumbled, and huge masses of rock, cleft in twain, hung over fissures freshly torn out of solid walls, and where flinty splinters scattered about bore witness that some mighty blast had rent the strong foundations of the earth.

"It's the powder," whispered the elder miner, drawing back. "You know, Logan, that was the place where they used to put it first," he continued, pointing

toward the mass of [illegible]
men started [illegible]
explosion [illegible]
shivered [illegible]
quartz and [illegible]
torch.

"Begorra, [illegible]
after [illegible]
in a frenzy of [illegible]
and took the [illegible]
hands. [illegible]
del in the [illegible]
side, a [illegible]
gleaming [illegible]
yellow [illegible]
ejaculations [illegible]
mine, [illegible]
fern-like [illegible]
nuggets [illegible]
kling [illegible]
brown earth. [illegible]
the miners [illegible]
sharp rocks [illegible]
last gold-gemmed [illegible]
harvest lay heaped in an open [illegible] section of broken pipe behind them.

No fear they felt of a second blast in the face of that glorious treasure. They were even desperate to dive farther; and one man, seizing a piece of wood from the wrecked timber supports, plunged it with all his strength into the harrowed pile of earth and broken rock at the closed mouth of the drift. Others followed

his example, until the little force were furiously scattering damp clods in all directions, and loose stones that gave a promise of golden worth were tossed carelessly behind them into a pile for future examination. Even the loose, crumbled soil seemed heavy and rich with that golden shower, and each stroke of their sticks seemed to the half-crazed men about to open a pocket lined with sheets of solid gold.

At length, in the midst of that wild confusion, one stopped and looked earnestly at something white, half buried in the mound before them. The others paused a moment to look also, and one gave it a push with his piece of board. It was no rock, that soft white thing; it was not stiffened paper, so wrinkled yet so firm. Was it — yes, surely, — oh, horrible, ghastly sight! — it was a human hand severed from the body, pale, and stained with earth, convulsively stretched wide open, and stiffened in that strange position. "Holy Virgin!" cried Logan, blessing himself and throwing down his stick. "It's graves we're digging into, boys, and it's bad luck we'll get of it all."

One miner lifted the terrible thing into the air, while from it dangled long, pearly tendons and pieces of mangled flesh. A profound silence fell over the little party, and for some moments no word was uttered, and no sound broke the awful stillness, until one miner said, in a loud, strained voice, "Let's look closer; what's that on the finger?" Sure enough, there was a ring on one of the shrunken fingers, a pretty cameo ring, delicate, yet richly carved in antique fashion; and with one accord the miners looked into each other's faces and said softly, "Knowles!"

"He was getting crazier every day," said one. "Something 'll come out yet. He helped Brooklyn with the fire, we can be mighty certain from the looks of things. He never acted straight after it; and I've been a-lookin' for suthin' like this here to happen every day."

"He's been doing penance, the poor divil!" said Logan. "And mighty good penance it was!" he added, pointing to the ore heap, to explain his ghastly joke; and thinking of the book in his pocket, he suggested that they search no farther until they had gone above ground to report their discovery of the body and Edward Dennett's newly found fortune. The proposition was readily accepted, so anxious were the miners to disclose their strange story; and so, loading themselves with their golden treasures, they seated themselves again in the cage, and shouted for the men at the top to "Hoist away." What wonder that excitement ran high when the miners neared the top of the winze and shouted up their great discoveries? It was almost past belief, until the glittering quartz was displayed, with its golden seams and nuggets; and the men, once more upon the green, bright surface of the earth, started breathlessly toward the town with their wonderful story about the Golden Deep.

That night in Mrs. Dennett's library the strange pocket-book was read. On the fly-leaf it bore the name of James P. Kinrake, and on the first few pages some unimportant accounts were set down, while further over on the last blank leaves a strange diary had been kept of a day's experience in the mine. After the Doctor's visit to Mr. Kinrake, Kinrake had

gradually lost his mind, becoming morbidly fearful that the secret of his crime would be divulged. Mr. Sevenoakes had repeatedly assured him of his safety, and advised him to leave the scenes around Lucky Streak forever, with the resolution to retrieve his evil life in a more friendly locality, but the poor wretch had persistently refused. It was supposed that in an insane freak he had wandered over to the Golden Deep, and had formed the resolution to explore the mysteries of the shaft. He had lowered himself into its black depths, and when he had reached the floor of the first level, hoisted the cage empty to the top again, leaving himself hopelessly imprisoned in a living tomb.

The diary in the pocket-book explained somewhat the terrible hallucination which had caused him to explode the blasting-powder.

March 10th.

Oh what joy! My first impulse after thanking Heaven is to write of the great peace I feel that I may at least die in the light. Though I have no hope of deliverance, and perhaps no one may ever penetrate to my dark underground tomb until both this record and I shall have been dissolved to earth, yet my wild brain must find some relief, and I will write to give to the explorer after the world's great motor — gold — something, though naught but a dead and unspeaking wail of a human brother who lived and suffered and perished long ago.

I must explain how I came here. But my brain is clouded; my thoughts whirl around like a vast wheel, so fast that I can catch nothing until at last it stops, and I see everything plain, and its tangled shape is made perfect again; but alas! the next moment all is lost, and I am weakly striving to remember and understand, while nothing rewards me but the consciousness that I am a human being shut up in a deep, chill cave far under the earth, and my wildest screams can only waken dull, hollow echoes from its terrible galleries.

Let me collect my thoughts. It seems years ago that one pleas-

and day I came to the mine — we called it the Golden Deep — on an investigating excursion. I descended to the first level, — there are two, and the lower one is partly filled with water, — and began exploring about until I came to a corner not far, which was shut away from the rest of the mine by a spring-door. It had been used to protect blasting-powder, when it was not immediately used, after being brought below surface. "Later I explore this hole," I had said, "I must go above-ground," but I missed my bunch of keys, and went back to look for it in the powder-room, and the door springing back by the prop which held it open failing, I was imprisoned behind thick walls of earth in a damp and noisome place, stifled for want of air, and with no hope except the shadowy one that some friend would miss me, and finding that I had undertaken to explore the mine, would think of the dark passage-way that led to my prison.

Ah! who could paint the agony of that hour? The first moments were terrible. The perspiration rolled from my forehead in rivers. I tore at the slimy walls with my nails, I screamed, I roared; but the door and the walls were solid. All was blackness above and below, and all around me, until I wondered if I were really in the flesh, or only a spirit without sight or consciousness, save that I was suffering the torments of the damned in the darkness of the pit. I was suffocating. A heavy weight was upon my chest, a thousand clanging bells were ringing in my ears, and the vague thought came to my mind through hundreds of other thoughts and feelings, — the relieving hope, — that I was dying.

After long unconsciousness I awoke again, — awoke, but I could remember nothing for a long time, — not even one thought about the outside world, — and lay as insensate and torpid as the crawling reptiles that went sliding about the slippery floor with me. I was lying on my face, so weak that I could not rise, but I reached out to the walls, and my hands met with a heavy, wood-like substance. Soon they came to what seemed to be the edge of this hard material, and the soil beneath it felt more dry and smooth than elsewhere about the walls. Then my thoughts came back to me with a sudden rush, not to bring the blank misery of despair, but the blessed realization that though death threatened, life was still mine, and that this was the door under which there was a crack that let in air. I might dig, then, with the surety that I was not working in the wrong direction into the solid earth. With my knife I began, and

burrowed so rapidly that soon I had a hole large enough to sink my arm in, and I knew by the relief I felt that the air was rushing through. I drank it in with an unquenchable thirst for a time, and then I could rise. Over in one corner I remembered to have seen a rack on which the powder was often placed to keep it dry. It was decayed and falling, but I found an iron prop fastened to a piece of broken wood, so I firmly grappled both and tried to twist them off. The wood was swelled and covered with blistering fungi, so that it was hard to hold, but with the strength of desperation I wrenched them loose. The iron had a pointed end, — it was a good tool, — and so I found the door again, and just beside it I began my work. What use to relate my toil? I had no thoughts but to dig. Rocks flew into my face and fell upon my feet; wet clods spattered down and sometimes suffocated me, so that I was compelled to seek relief and rest at my ventilator under the door; but still I worked, until at length, after long hours, the final barrier crumbled, and I was free. I was free for what? Only one blessing, — that of light; for was I not deep down in the forgotten mine, where soon starvation and the vile breath of the decaying timbers would destroy me? From a narrow passage I beheld a glow, and groping toward it slowly, and feeling my way lest I should fall through some deep winze or into a rotting pool, I found my torch all burned but the final inch, which drew from me shouts of gladness, repeated by the echoes back like thousands of dull groans and faint whispers from the peopled blackness of the galleries beyond. By this ray of light I found other torches; and now I satisfy my hunger with the loathsome creatures that share my abode. I write to keep away the burning madness that creeps over me, and wait for death.

Yesterday a man, very thin and very tall, whose hair and face and eyes were snowy white, — only the latter burned like stars when he spoke, — came slowly up out of the black pool in the corner of my cave, and stood before me. "What is your mission?" I asked.

"To show you all the great, strange mechanism of the undercarth," he said, in a loud voice that shook the rocks from the crumbling walls. And then a pure white fire burned around his feet, like a cloud, and a faint music, sweet and rare, was struck from chords far under the earth.

"Come," he said; and immediately the ground fell away from before him, where the white flame burned, and clasping me together we sank far underground, the solid rock [illegible] make us a path, but closing again behind us. We passed [illegible] wonderful veins of gold hidden in lodges deep down in the [illegible] the soil, and now and then a garnet or rich fronde [illegible] fell into the burning fumes of fire that ploughed [illegible] long journeying we came at last to what the stranger [illegible] the soil below the mines of Lucky Streak. I told [illegible] sounded familiar; but he said, O no, I had never [illegible] and we must keep very still, for we were [illegible] boring where the voices of the miners could [illegible] Click, click, sounded a picking hammer. [illegible] that light, boys, over in the tunnel to the [illegible] there." Then again: "Hoist away, — all [illegible] a rumbling sound, that seemed to disturb [illegible] us, and then a rattling, and I asked in [illegible] "Only the car coming down the incline." [illegible] and again a voice, — oh Heaven! my Maid's [illegible] as I remember it so well, saying, "How [illegible] miners are gone! I do not like it so well. I [illegible] miss the lights on their hats, making the [illegible] ing army of men scattered into every [illegible] my dear, it is not pleasant; and beside, [illegible] I must take you up again; these [illegible] too; so come." Edward Dennett's voice [illegible] guards her! Something made me shudder and grow [illegible] must go," said my guide. "The [illegible] the mine is making you ill."

We travelled far, often for miles through solid rock and [illegible] time came to where the earth was loose, and yet we [illegible] slowly. "Why do we not go faster when we can make [illegible] easily?" I inquired. "We are coming [illegible] the surface, so I must be careful not to disturb the [illegible] let you look upon the faces of the dead in [illegible] manded the fire to burn quietly, and it smouldered for a time, until at length the fumes cleared away, returning like a lining to the four walls, and there glowed steadily in a bright, refulgent light. In the centre of our square space was a long, black casket with

withered flowers upon it. We stood in silence. I removed my hat, and the Spirit of the Ground took off his crown, made of crisp, bright crystals from the ice-caves. "Shall we look upon his face?" he said. I bent and read what was engraved upon the plate, — "George Brooklyn, aged 30 years"; and then I looked at the face. He was lying partly on his side, and his expression was calm and peaceful; his hands, white and cold and deathly, were laid upon his breast, while around him were scattered dry and crumbling rose leaves. One had fallen upon his face, and I tried to move him to shake it off, and as I lifted up his head I saw that the whole side of his face was scorched and scarred. "Alas!" I cried to the spirit, "we have burned him." And then my words dissolved the spell, the scene had passed away, and the white flame spurted forth again in a brilliant cloud of incandescent loveliness. Soon we were moving on, our strange fire purifying all decay, past graves in which were lying the young and fair, half fallen into dust, sometimes a plump cheek gone, and sometimes the pale hands withered; past the old, lying dead with silver locks grown long about their peaceful faces, — all wrapped in that breathless calm that enchains them till the last great call. We began to sink deep again, and after long silence and much journeying, the Ground Spirit said we were very far down in the earth, travelling under the boundless ocean-bed, with miles of purple waves tossing above us. We came upon old wrecks, which the drifting, restless waters had buried deep in the settling sands and matted sea-weeds until the waters rolled above. There were queer things in them, — bright jewels, human bones preserved, the strange machinery of the olden times, and quaint little boats in which the fishers long ago drifted over the smooth, sparkling waters, and under the soft, azure sky, feeling as if they sailed between two tender, gentle heavens.

"Only one thing more will I show you," said the spirit; and instantly we went crashing through a bed of rock that turned to a field of diamonds as we sped on. Millions of brilliant gems were crushed, the bright powder flying like sparks of fire, and making magnificent halos of light all about the larger stones that were falling heavily, yet glowing as suns, with glistenings of purple and scarlet and green, into the fire around us. In dew-like showers they fell, shivered sometimes to long splinters like needles, rounded at others like smooth, lustrous pearls or drops of water. "This is part of my

work," said the Spirit of the Ground. "I always plough through the diamond bowlders, to break and crumble them." After this he breathed upon me, and I saw no more, until he said in a loud voice, "Arouse! we are nearing the Golden Deep"; and I awoke just in time to get a glimpse of our path as we were rising to enter the mine. We rose from the powder-room, and I saw, as we passed up, a marvellous pocket of gold, rich, heavy nuggets embedded in buried ledges, which we loosened, cropping out even to the surface of the excavation. I was entranced with wonder. "This mine is not a useless one," I said; but the spirit answered not. He placed me where I sat when he took me away, stood for a space in silent majesty before me, while sweet, harp-like music floated through the dark, echoing tunnels, said a farewell that haunted me long with its awful grandeur, and then disappeared into the pool whence he came forth.

There are gates of ivory in the heavens. One night — it was night because the stars were shining when we rose from earth — a troop of spirits gave me wings to fly with them far into the vast regions of space. The stars that I have so often watched on balmy summer evenings in my night vigils, or when sleeping out under the clear winter skies, while they burned like constellations of diamonds through the blackness of space, grew larger and more beautiful as we flew toward them. Faint through the misty whiteness of unnumbered worlds other stars appeared, that had never been revealed to the naked eye looking upward from the world below. I looked back to the earth whence we came. Morning must have broken over it since we left, for all about it shone a white glory of light, reaching far up to where the atmosphere merged into space, yet crystal as a covering of water. There were its dark lines seas washing against the shores of silver that quickly blended into green, the mountains white-tipped and gleaming, and the lakes and rivers purely bright, shining in the new day. And then came that thought about the infinite power of vision, and the slow unveiling of light that supposes one to stand with these wonderful eyes upon a distant planet, and the light from the world which must journey eighteen hundred years to reach him bears pictures of scenes in the old Bible days. So actions in ever lost, as deed is ever done that cannot be viewed from some orb of the skies where the light can be seen.

We passed the moon. It was cold and white, and wrapped in a

a veil with a silvery, gold-lighted mist. After that came the deep serenity of space beyond, suns terrible in their destroying glare, planets swinging in their unyielding orbits, constellations stretching far out in a billowy cloud of whiteness. Nebula after nebula were revealed. Countless thousands — ay, myriads — of worlds were passed, systems great and small, with their planets and satellites, and comets that shook their showers of flashing meteors through illimitable tracts of space; until wearied, I asked of the spirits, "Where is the roof of heaven?"

"The roof of heaven," "the roof of heaven," they answered.

"Or where is the gate?"

"The gate," "the gate," was all I heard.

"Tell me!" I cried, in the agony of alarm, for we seemed floating on forever through the boundless regions of the stars. As I spoke, sheets of flame blew past us, and then darkness quenched the light of all the stars, and we were lifted up and up, we knew not whither. Then I was in ecstacies, — I was filled with raptures of which I had never even dreamed before. We stopped, and a sudden rolling sound came to us, and then as light broke dimly on our benighted senses, Paradise opened out before our entranced vision. Light pure and holy and soft shed floods of glory over all, — long vistas, bright aisles, gorgeous streams of light, were there. Great raptures of melody, such as satisfied all we miss in our earthly harmonies, drifted out to our charmed senses, for here the soul of music dwelt. Far as the eye could see stretched the fields of glory, and away down through the centre swept a broad pathway like a river of glass leading up to the limitless gates of pearl, that opened into heaven itself; they extended upward till their tops were hidden in the unbearable light, the indescribable beauty of the everlasting day; they reached far out on either side, till the mind could not comprehend their immensity.

I looked again, and behold! two gates of ivory had rolled apart to reveal this glimpse of Paradise; but we were still without. And then a mighty angel, terrible in his majesty, said: "Man, what dost thou here at the gate of Paradise in thy garb of fleshly worldliness?" But I could answer not; so he said again, "Ye, born upon the earth, organic being from a world organic, how canst thou conceive of aught else but that things have still a beginning and an end? How can a mind chained to its prison of flesh grasp eternity in its

understanding? Knowest thou not the rules of earth still bind thee? Over thee the law of gravitation yet holds its sway: thou canst not comprehend what is not up or down, below or above. The bliss of heaven thou canst not enjoy in thy present temple of flesh; no sense of the great glory rewards thee for being here. In the free spirit come, and delights insufferable to thee now await thee cleansed from thy taint of earth."

"Oh what shall I do to comprehend and reach that heavenly state?" I asked.

Then the angel looked very tenderly down upon me, shone with a renewed loveliness, and said, what I had learned long years ago at my mother's knee, "He that believeth in Me I will in no wise cast out. Haste thee back to earth again, for thou art coming soon. Mark well the time, — prepare!" And then the ivory gates closed round, and we were left without in darkness; the torments of the condemned seemed to seize me, weights of a thousand tons were pressing on my frame; and yet I could not die, though excruciating agonies racked me, though I could neither hear nor see, though my brain seemed crushed to atoms. Long lines of white stretching far across a black, immeasurable gulf presented themselves to a sense within me rather than to my outward vision, and over these interminable, silvery cords I swiftly flew, borne on and on like lightening through an unending cycle, till I roused myself with one last wild effort of despair, and cried to the spirits who followed me, "Oh! will this last forever?"

"Forever!" "forever!" they echoed. A long lament my unruly wrought soul was forced to utter in its anguish, and the spell was broken. The clear light of the stars broke over me again, the sublime perfection of the heavens unveiled itself to my released senses, and anthem my unutterable sorrow to an end. Far, far below, through the mists of a hundred million spheres we journeyed, till a bright little planet glowed beneath us. My soul again first like a great brilliant moon outlined by the misty darkness of space behind it, but growing larger and larger till its outlines were distinct and its rugged surface engraved with the well familiar pictures of terrestrial beauty. The materialized universe of the world came near me, and we were almost one again and though I mutely urged the spirits to leave me in the air, gaze with they only reverently repeated my request, and bore me to my earthly inn, and left

me to ponder on my wonderful journey skyward to explore the inexhaustible splendors of the heavens.

If I could but follow the grave, majestic Spirit of the Ground! He will never return, I fear; and yet if I had his power of ploughing through the solid granite stretching in mountain chains across the hemisphere, what gold and gems and wealth of prehistoric times should be mine! But best of all, I could scatter showers — floods of gold and treasure — over the mining town, as we, like fiends, scattered the all-consuming flames that night. And then they would forget their dire misfortune in this new gladness.

My torch is smoking. What a cold, sickly light! It flickers in this noisome atmosphere, and longs, lingers, fairly thirsts, as I do, for a bright, warm ray of sunshine. I wish the soft, bright beams of the sun would fall upon me, making dry and glossy again this clammy, dripping hair, which presses upon my head like the cruel hand of an evil jinnee. Oh, that I could feel the sunshine folded about me with its warm and clinging folds of light. The soft beams would press my forehead like dear, loving hands, and clear away these mists and tangled webs that make me feel so strange and terrible at times. Hark! I hear again the voices of the angels. Why was it that I did not go with them? Repent, they said, and come. I have bitterly and sincerely repented, but I cannot go. Ah! why did I not think of it before? I will leave this note-book at the foot of the shaft, for I will never return, since I have found wings, and can at last escape. The end of this glimmering torch will set off the powder in the powder-room, and on the wings of light which will unfold from the dark mass I shall soar upward, — straight upward, beyond the starry systems of the suns, and the gates of ivory, to the fountain-head of eternal light and peace.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MABEL'S JOURNEY.

> There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> 'T will make endurable which else would break the heart.
>
> WORDSWORTH.

THE winter came. Far away in their city home on the coast, where the pearly fog-banks wrapped the earth in a steamy mantle, and over the wind-blown hills the earliest rains fell like a shower of verdure, where the wintry sun still beamed with a semi-tropical brightness, and made snow-drifts out of the long white stretches of sand, Mabel and her aunt scarcely realized that autumn had not melted into spring. One day Mrs. Willis, after a week's mysterious behavior, informed her niece that they were on the eve of a journey East. "We are too poor to stay here for the winter," she said. "The mite we have left would vanish entirely after half a season's gayety. So we must hide ourselves from the reach of fashion's demands."

Mrs. Willis did not add what her private reasons were for this step, nor excuse her previous conduct when she had been so inexorably averse to a life isolated from society, on Mabel's suggestion that they find a quiet home in her loved Lilla. She had reasoned it out in this wise: that Mabel was young yet; she could not afford to lose her darling for a year or so at least, and hence a season in an old-fashioned Yankee town at the

quiet home of her grandfather would not be so misspent as to injure the young girl's prospects in life. Besides, this course would be prudent for economical reasons. But aside from these arguments in its favor, there was another, more powerful than any of the rest. Edward Dennett had risen up among Mrs. Willis's mental file of traitorous villains ready to steal Mabel, the most black-hearted and dangerous of them all. The others dwindled into mere pigmies in comparison to him. She had been ignorant in regard to the true state of affairs, until Mabel's paling cheek had given warning that some weighty trouble was the cause of it. She came to her senses at once, and realized that the affair had already gone on far too long, that Mabel really loved that young man who had spent his life in the mines, and whose name was disgraced by the charge of a heinous crime.

He would soon tire of his exile, and come hovering around to get a glimpse of Mabel, or write to her, and stir up matters afresh.

The best thing possible would be to get Mabel out of the way, where no letter would reach her, and no messages or even news could be exchanged.

Hence it was only on the eve of their departure that Mabel was informed of their projected journey, lest a clandestine correspondence might begin while the plans were maturing. Mabel received the intelligence in silence, and made her simple preparations without a murmur. What could it matter to her when her heart would surely ache, whithersoever she might go? Would it not be better to bury those haunting memories in new scenes and a new life? And so they went.

The winter passed. It was a long, long, dreary one

to Mabel in their snow-bound retreat, and often there came to her visions of her far-off California home, with its flowery hills, its balmy air, its matchless beauties. But when spring peeped up through the white coverlet on the ground in the form of dainty May-flowers, they prepared to turn their faces to that glorious land of the setting sun, toward which Mabel's weary, homesick heart turned with nameless longing. Hers was not a love which loves lightly and forgets. Her whole faith, the beauty, the poetry, the longing of her nature, were expressed in it. Ah! then how could she cast it all aside, and take up other joys, forgetful of the past? She did not brood with inconsolable pain over her sorrow, but her delicate, sensitive heart had been touched too deeply for the wound to heal with the balm of time and absence; and so, although her spirits were light and her manner as sweetly joyous as of old, there was a memory in her heart too sacred for the outer world to look upon, which brought her hours of tender longing and regret, and darkened all her inner life with a melancholy shadow.

Mrs. Willis noted every indication of returning cheerfulness in Mabel with satisfaction, and after a little discreet questioning, decided that all the danger which had so troubled her was past, and she could at last go home. Mabel's heart thrilled with joy through every mile of their westward journey.

Somehow in her mind her distant California home, with its fair, blue mountains, its wide, sunny valleys of grain, its semi-tropic bloom, and the dreamy atmosphere of the old pastoral days of the Spanish dominion, still breathing with luxurious quiet through the stir-

ring life which later thronged its gold-browed hills, seemed like a dream of Paradise, where life could not be anything but sweet and peaceful. The first vision of its snowy peaks, trembling like white clouds on the low horizon, brought a rapture unspeakable. Perhaps somewhere among those gleaming summits he whom she loved so fondly waited with strong courage and patient fortitude that time when the blighted promise of his earnest life should bloom; and then, — ah! the hope was sweet if vain, — perhaps he might be waiting with glad tidings for her anxious heart.

Home at last! Home that was dearer now than it ever was before, with its old associations of her girlish dreams, its calm delights, its welcome rest!

All the long winter Mabel had not received the slightest message from those friends her heart held so dear in the far-distant mountains; and after a little conscientious deliberation, she decided to write to Mrs. Dennett without her aunt's knowledge. It seemed so cruel, she felt, to neglect them in their misfortune, and it would not matter if Aunt Cynthia discovered her act after the letter was sent. So she wrote a long message, describing her Eastern visit, and modestly putting in little touches of sympathy which yet scarcely reminded Mrs. Dennett of her sorrow. After the letter had been sent two or three weeks, Mrs. Willis handed a letter to Mabel, with the playful remark that perhaps in it she might find a pleasant reminder of a summer's flirtation. With trembling hands Mabel opened it, and discovered that more than a week had passed since its arrival. It was from Mrs. Dennett, a pleasant letter, fraught with an undercurrent of cheer,

seemingly impossible to a mother whose best hope was dead. Mabel read it through with eager joy.

MY DEAR MABEL, —

Though months have passed since your bright face gladdened my lonely home, sitting here in this long, low room as I do to-day, and looking at the empty chair by the west window where you used to sit, your very presence is with me, and your cheering influence dispels the gloominess of this chill March day. For though lighted by a pale and wintry sun, the sky seems cold and cheerless, and the signs of awakening spring do not serve to bring its spirit, though we see it coming in the budding trees and the white flakes from the bee-haunted boughs of the almonds, the yellowish mosses and the tender grasses crowding up through the damp, thick mats of dead pine-needles in the woods, and the deep blue summits of the nearer heights forsaken by their coverlets of gleaming snows, save here and there, in the sunless seams, a soft, white, foamy mass.

This world of ours, high up beyond the foothills, and shut out, by many a purple fold of hills and many a wall of flinty rock and living pine, from the busy, changing world in which you live, still has its histories, humble and unwritten though they be, and its changes, coming slowly day by day, that soon become as real as the varying seasons of the year. For that great scene of desolation, ashes, and destruction which you left has changed with the progress of the months, until now the yellowish pine lumber of the new-built town catches the first beams of the rising sun on scores of shining roofs.

We are almost proud of our new town; it has risen under a hundred hammers that kept the hillsides echoing with their ring from the early dawn until the last glory on the westward mountains yielded to the dusky night. And now for all this toil the resonant plank has risen into shape and order, and we have the stores and shops, the cabins and the homes, as you once saw them, only they are all more new and bright.

Where stood the Royal Regina on the hill-slope, its successor has risen, taller and more majestic than the old, because robbed of its surrounding sheltering groves. Long weeks passed before its great naked beams and rafters received a covering of wall and roof, but now it is rapidly nearing completion, and all about it are laid out spacious grounds for lawns and gardens, and the slim Australian

gum in a few years will substitute those majestic pines that went down with all their secrets of the ages in clouds of smoke and fire.

The mines are in motion again, though it was some time after our great conflagration before the broken aqueducts could be renewed, and the scattered miners gathered to the work. Now the shrill whistle wakes the slumbering cañons with its piercing blasts; and Mr. Sevenoakes — perhaps you still remember him — is struggling to get his business into shape again. Edward's position has been filled by a stranger, but times are dull yet, for the mines do not promise the wealth they did before the fire. I fear that scorching flame consumed the bright halo of prosperity that hovered over this wild, mountainous spot.

But last of all, — now that I have given you a brief outline of affairs here, — I am going to make a suggestion to you. Spring has come; why cannot you come with it? My home and my best love are waiting. I cannot tell you what prompts this daring proposition, — for I would not presume to make it without some sanction from a more hopeful future, you know. I would not dare to tempt myself with your sweet friendship, if all hope were past. I shall write to your aunt, with the view of prevailing on her to make the visit, and the time will pass wearily until your reply assures me of my anticipated pleasure.

Trusting that some things I much desire to tell you have not been needlessly withheld, and that soon I shall have the opportunity of seeing you, that I may tell them better,

I remain, yours faithfully,

FRANCES DANNETT.

Mabel handed the letter to her aunt in silence, but Mrs. Willis shook her head. "You may do as you like about going," she said; "I am willing, if you care to make the trip." Mabel opened her eyes in wonder. "I have written to Mr. Sevenoakes since I received a letter from Mrs. Dennett," Mrs. Willis volunteered to state, — "I have discovered that I can allow it."

"Oh, Aunt Cynthia!" cried Mabel, impetuously kissing her wrinkled cheek, "you look lovelier than ever before in your life!"

# CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE FULFILMENT.

**Love is represented as the fulfilling of the law, — a creature's perfection. All other graces, all divine dispensations, contribute to this, and are lost in it as in a heaven. It expels the dross of our nature; it overcomes sorrow; it is the full joy of our Lord. — HOOKER.**

IT was twilight in the mountains. The sun had just set behind the green and purple battlements in the west, leaving gold-emblazoned banners of cloud resting above the bright horizon. March was nearly over, so its starry, golden pansies and glossy-petalled buttercups were giving place to gorgeous banks and meadows of spring-time's richest, deepest bloom. Bluebells nodded on brittle stems from the shelter of overhanging rocks, showing distinctly their delicate, fair hues against heavy fronds of rank young ferns. Great clumps of wild California poppies flamed from the rocky hill-crests, their silken, pollen-dusted petals folding up after the kisses of the twilight breeze. Musk blooms waved gracefully from mossy, dew-gemmed banks by the creeks, and rich, heavy vines trailed their brilliant sprays of scarlet-lipped blossoms over the steep hill-sides, where only the slender fir and pine dared to climb among the rocky ribs.

In the swales and on the gentle slopes, beds of gold and white and azure hid the tender greenness of the grass, or mingled their bright colors with its rich growth in the deepest, dewiest hollows.

Mabel Willis wandered out alone from Mrs. Dennett's house for a breath from the fresh-scented wildwood and the sweet, closing flowers, ere the twilight faded. She and her aunt had just arrived. After a few minutes spent in joyous greetings, Mrs. Dennett had shown her guests to their rooms, saying that all news and good tidings must be kept until they had relieved themselves of the dust and weariness of travel.

But Mabel could not bear the thought of remaining in-doors while the strange, wild beauty of the twilight deepened. So hastily brushing her hair, bathing her face with the clear spring water which Mrs. Dennett had provided for her room, and changing her travelling-suit for a dress of soft, dark green material, as if to wear the bright livery of spring, and fastening a scarf of frosty lace about her throat, her simple preparations were made. Mrs. Willis had only commenced her toilet, so Mabel had stepped through the low-silled window for a breath of the deep, sweet grass that grew untrodden in the garden.

Roses of all descriptions flourished there: great bending trees, with golden-tinted tea-roses bursting the firm buds into showers of fair, broad petals over all the wealth of new and glossy leaves; straight, thorn-girt stalks, with scarlet velvet buds half blown blushing brighter in the sunset gold; dainty, willowy sprays with buds of white and blush hiding beneath a green frost-work of moss; pretty vines of Baltimores climbing unchecked over windows and lattice; and bushes with long, nodding sprays on which the fair, pink buds of old Castile breathed in their drowsy perfume something of the dreamy romance of the elder Spain in this

strange, wild land of gold, unfolding like a mighty new-born empire before the startled world.

Mabel had walked through the long grass nodding sleepily in the gentle wind, past each budding rose-bush, to a gate which opened out on one side of the garden. Stealing a glance back at the white house hiding behind the green, spreading trees and clustering rose-bowers, she had lifted the latch and ventured out. Only a glimpse of that glorious sunset over the far-off hills, she had longed for, but now she must go farther, for all around her stretched a wide clover-meadow, and bright slopes draped with broideries of nature's choicest art. A few frolicsome calves galloped about in that valley-like swale between the hills, while their soft-eyed mothers lowed gently as they came homeward along the trail that led across the slopes, and looked longingly toward them from the pasture bars.

"This scene is just as Edward used to see it when a boy," mused Mabel, wandering farther through the damp, fresh clover, trying to realize how the years had changed all but the spot itself, which was renewed with each reopening of spring, and wondering if at twilight his thoughts ever returned to his far-away mountain home,—to that little blooming meadow associated with his happy, careless boyhood. Alas! to him that old house gleaming through the trees was home no more! Memories he might have of his mother's dear face smiling on him from that vine-shaded doorway, of her tenderness as she stroked his fair hair from his boyish face, of the old home's cheerful, glowing hearth, that corner-stone of all love's sweetest, tenderest joy; but these could be nothing more than memories to him now.

Something more glittering than dew fell in the deep, wild grass; but Mabel checked herself. All through the weary months of the past winter she had gleaned comfort from that vision when heaven seemed all around her, and her vain hopes all fulfilled. "No wonder he was strong. It is a little fort," she thought again, looking away with a calm thrill of rapture. And then came to her some realization of how high—how near to heaven—she was in that little plateau among the mountains; how beyond the blue line of ranges in the west green slopes unnumbered slowly descended to the great inland valley country, where another world rolled on with the heat and turmoil of crowded cities, the noise and clashing of man against his brother, in a cruel, never-ending warfare. Far away from it all, up there in that spring-time twilight among the hills, there was peace,—peace in its gentle winds, its dreamy quiet, its ever-changing, softened beauty.

She wandered on till she reached a gray fence of logs, moss-covered and decaying, through which the wild oats sent up sharp budding spears of satiny green, and around which the grass grew thick and tall. An old orchard on the other side bent its gnarled branches as if to shelter that low, rude fence with a canopy of nature's arches, filled in with the pearly beauty of clustering apple blossoms. Mabel could look far in and see the long aisles of the orchard, dark and shadowy on the ground, but lighted with a glory overhead from a fluttering mass of snowy bloom. Long sprays and branches swayed and nodded and rustled gently, and sometimes from the white-crowned almonds a storm of flaky petals fluttered out upon the breeze, sifting

[illegible] the tall [illegible] like [illegible] bloom [illegible] breeze as if [illegible] ivory, and [illegible] ding leaves of [illegible]

Presently a [illegible] the tall, [illegible] over, until it reached [illegible] the old log [illegible]. It [illegible] curls on her forehead and played coquettishly with the soft lace at her neck as if it loved to linger around so fair a flower, though free to roam at will through countless miles of bloom.

Something in the woodings of that cool, fresh breeze, —the scent of pine, the fleeting breath of wild-rose brambles, or the blended perfumes of a thousand flowers, —caught in its wanderings over those verdant slopes, brought back to her a spell, —that lingering, mournful sweetness clustering around her memories of those wild old scenes, like the ceaseless melody that echoes in the heart after the trembling chords of perfect song are stilled. Through the waving apple-boughs she caught glimpses of the hard, red stage road winding along the slopes, and then there flashed across her mind the memory of one rainy night in winter when she had watched a lonely horseman wend his way along its gleaming track. [illegible] a glorious crown of radiance [illegible] Alas, for him who rode away that night [illegible]

of life had nourished no seeds of joy to blossom into spring-time! She bowed her head on the gray log beside her, while a bunch of bluebells, growing in a sheltered niche just below, swam in the cloud of tears that veiled her eyes. Still that cool breeze lingered around her, bringing its matchless odors, the low whisperings of the leaves above, the rustling of its footsteps in the grass; and once she thought she caught the low murmurs of a song,—"Home again,"—like the faint, harp-like melodies of the pine-trees. And then the next instant she heard another echo, more deep and strong, and nearer,—"from a foreign shore,"—swelling out across the meadow, too clear and full of soul-like harmony to spring from the moaning pine-leaves. She looked up. No one was near; no singer followed the narrow path from the house; no form darkened the green meadow beyond. She turned her face toward the orchard, but the crisp sprays only nodded and whispered and fluttered, and the rank, untrodden grass only shivered in the white glow that sifted down through the flower-set boughs.

She stood musing thus, listening for another strain of that mysterious song, breathing the sweet scents of that breeze, dreaming again the by-gone dreams it brought her, until the fiery splendor of the sunset faded to a mellow glory, and she roused herself to go back to the house.

One glance more she must bestow on that soft blue heaven above her, tinged with gold, and filled with scarlet-tinted, filmy clouds. She lingered, with her eyes fixed afar on those brilliant deeps of heaven, till the dark horizon below seemed to whirl and swim

around her, and she looked down on the blossoming world again.

Then a strange sound in the orchard startled her, and there, just beside the fence, standing where the apple-boughs let in the richest light of sunset, was a stranger, tall, bearded, travel-worn, leaning on a mossy stake, and looking at her with tender, earnest eyes. Ah, those eyes! Could she ever forget them? Could they ever cease to beam with light for her?

That weary man, whose face had lost much of its boyish roundness, much of its hearty cheer,—that sorrow-stricken man, who had come from afar, over the seas, to his own little home among the mountains, — was Edward Dennett.

Their eyes met, and he knew her. Ay, he knew more,—he knew that she had been true to him; he knew that her love, without which he realized that his home-coming would be touched with shadow, was his still.

"Mabel!" he said, hastening toward her, "what a welcome is this! Are you a spirit? Am I dreaming that I find *you* here to welcome me? I could not realize it,—I *cannot* believe it!" Mabel held out both her hands across the fence to the strong brown ones that waited ready to clasp them.

"Can you believe it now?" she said, striving to speak calmly through her tears.

Edward hurriedly sprang over the fence, and stood at her side. "Nothing must separate us now," he said, as he took her in his arms,—"nothing but death, my Mabel, for I can believe it; I can believe that, now I am free to live,—free to live, thank Heaven!—I still

have something to live for. Ah, Mabel! little the world held for me without your love!"

"Then you are free?" said Mabel, timidly.

"Don't you know?" he inquired, hastily. "Have you not heard how the secret was divulged? It must be old to every one but me."

"I did not know —" began Mabel.

"Ah! then I will not tell you until I rejoice over the greatest blessing life can ever hold for me, — the assurance that you love me still through all depths of misfortune and disgrace. I was restored to my home, I was blessed with riches, for untold wealth lies buried in the Golden Deep, and yet until this hour life has looked dull and colorless indeed. I count my trials joys for this. Without them I should not have known how true and changeless your affection is."

"Do not say that," said Mabel. "Did it need testing before you could trust in it? I kept my faith in yours. Oh, Edward! I never entertained a thought during all our hopeless separation which could mar that meeting when our lives are done. That hope wherein you and I found so much comfort has kept me loving and constant still."

Each realized that the other was changed. They had passed through the fires of trial; they had met Fate face to face, and had defied her, putting their trust in a higher power, that reigns supreme over all our destinies.

If youth was still theirs, they knew that its careless mirth, its impetuous ardor, was over. But they were better for it, — their lives were broader, deeper, sweeter; they were man and woman now, seeing with eyes that

look beyond the world's exterior of show, into the purposes, the aims, of life, knowing full well how to cast aside its trifling frivolities, and accept its blessings with ready, grateful hearts.

Now life lay before them, rich in its opportunities, fair and promising in its prospects. They were young, but they were wise. Through their misfortunes they had learned how to be kind; through their blessings they had learned how to be charitable.

"God is good," said Edward, reverently, at last. "He has given you back to me; he has given me my heaven upon earth; and for this blessing we must spend our lives in giving of our abundance to others. Oh, Mabel! little did I think the fulfilment of your promise would come so soon,—that dear, sweet promise to meet me in heaven, filled to the very letter here on earth,—'And when at last he reaches home, tell him my love will be waiting for him there.'"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE MILLENNIUM OF THE HEART.

Devotion wafts the mind above,
But heaven itself descends in love;
A feeling from the Godhead caught,
To wean from self each sordid thought;
A ray of Him who formed the whole;
A glory circling round the soul.

BYRON.

In the pleasant valley county, where the low, rolling slopes are bright in spring and summer with billowy seas of green and ripening gold; where the little towns scattered about over the broad expanse of the great wheat regions hide their gleaming spires in forests of cork and locust trees; where the noisy trains rumble hastily along, busily collecting their burdens of plump, clean sacks of wheat from every wayside station; and where the broad country roads lead in a curious network to farm colonies, with a cluster of neat houses, high, spacious barns, and golden or weather-darkened stacks of straw, forming the centre of broad acres stretching out in vast, unbroken tracks, — in that almost boundless empire of golden grain, Lois found her home.

The occasional stranger who wandered into the rural shades of Locustville invariably asked who owned that fine old place just outside the town on the road to Tenayee, and the villager would reply with a good deal

of pride, as if he had a personal claim upon it, that Dr. Knapp and his family lived there. Dr. Knapp was "our doctor," and the place was absolutely the most exquisite, comfortable home in all the country

The house stood back a little distance from the travelled road, from which a smooth, gravelled drive swept through an arched gateway and across the dewy greenness of the grounds, till it curved up to the wide side entrance. The house was large, square-built, and homelike, with old-fashioned porches and balconies extending all around it, suggestive of balmy summer evenings, with guitars and white-robed ladies making little poems of the hours spent in their vine-scented shelter. Oleander and acacia trees blended their tropical odors with the fragrant breath of roses, wild beds of mignonette, and a hedge of honeysuckle, and over on one side of the grounds a sparkling path led down across the shaven lawn to a wild bramble of bloom, where the flowers and bushes ran riot, and blossomed in charming disorder wherever a bud could manage to shake out its rosy petals to the kisses of the sun.

Something about this luxuriant tangle might remind one of Mrs. Hunman's queer old garden, but Dr. Knapp certainly liked his own shady bower far better than the one from which he modelled it. And whoever wondered at it, when during the drowsy summer afternoons, while the day grew warm and the teams out on the road rolled by only at long intervals, and then chose the track under the wayside trees, they saw the Doctor enjoying the dreamy shade of that fragrant spot in some comfortable old wicker chair, or half reclining in a gently swaying hammock, while Lois — the very

same bright little school-mistress who used to teach in the red school-house at Locustville, grown older certainly, though not less charming and lovely — read some idle, sweet romance to while away the hours? Children's merry faces and gleeful laughter broke in upon that sleepy peace just enough to bring the time and place out of some old Arcadian land of poets' dreams into the sparkling light of breathing, joyous reality. Ah! who could dwell in a shadowy past, when there were two round-limbed, sweet-faced children about them, fluttering here and there among the glowing leaves, reaching up with soft, dainty hands to force some bud into premature bloom, or exhibiting tearfully a thorn-rent frill of lace on their cool white frocks?

The wanton breezes sometimes idly turned a leaf of the painted picture-books, or blew a glossy curl into a tangle of spun silk, thereby calling forth from rosy, pouting lips an impatient little laugh, which rang out so full and clear as to scare away the gray linnets flitting among the branches.

And if ever, when the full glory of summer had come, a faint high hissing of a bee recalled to the Doctor a sorrowful summer day long ago when he had heard that selfsame sound high up in the leaves of the apple-tree which grew in Mrs. Hunman's garden, and it brought back a remembrance of the old heartache he had accepted as his portion then, he banished the thought by a glance at Lois, — kind, merry-hearted Lois, — sitting near him with a look of love which the years had added on her fair face, whose earthly journey now led step by step with his. Why should he return, even in thought, to that other garden, marred

by the memory of a heartache, when here around him was another bower, as wild and sweet and tangled, which not only encompassed all the delightful associations of the other, but held a charm besides, born of the long, delightful years, which could never be effaced?

Behind that fine white house, and across a shadowy back garden, where the grape-vines ran in riotous festoons over the arching trees, a commodious barn revealed a patch of its sloping roof. Whoever ventured out of the cool, grassy precincts of the garden for a nearer glimpse of it felt that the cows and horses had not been deprived of many of the good things this world could afford them, when looking upon the well-stored granary, the gravel-bottomed tank overflowing with pure, clear water, and the stacks of hay that preserved in their gold-green masses the fading hues and the fresh, sweet scent of the blooming pasture-lands. And even the doves that described white circles against the far-off blue of heaven, and gathered with incessant cooing around the little dove-cot below the eaves, seemed telling their contentment in those soft, low sounds. Then there was the poultry-yard, whence clarion crows in the early morning hours rang out to wake the soft-voiced, bright-eyed calves in the barn, and mingle their faint, far sounds with the dreams of the slumberers in the distant house.

But of all the favored occupants of the barn-yard regions, Lady Snowdrop was the queen. She had a stall in the clean, warm stables, whose floor was overflowed with sweet meadow-grass and barley-hay and grain, and every morning the heather curried and combed her till her white coat shone as ghostly as satin.

The Doctor still drove about over the country roads in his odd little shiny gig. And Lois, as might be imagined, went with him very often.

And there were often journeys to Lois's old loved home among the far-off hills, for a visit to Aunt Robinson and the girls. But the "girls" gradually became fewer and fewer in the old house, as one after another called Lois and the sympathetic Doctor into high consultation about a prospective wedding, and at last became queens in homes of their own. Still, the warm fireside never lost its charm,—never lacked for the old familiar faces; for when Christmas-tide brought its frosty winds, its whitened summits, and sparkling pines, it also brought a grand home-coming,—a sweet reunion to all the tender hearts that never lost their love for home.

John used to do the honors on those glorious feast-days,—the same mischievous John, with the old merry twinkle in his eyes, only the experience and prosperity of years had added something of dignity and gravity to his manner, as if the light-hearted enthusiasm of youth had not perished, but had given place somewhat to a more stately, thoughtful mein. And surely John had need of dignity, for after he had filled with honor the position procured for him by the Doctor in the mine at Lucky Streak, he had been called to be manager of the far more prosperous mine of the Golden Deep. Life held for him a bright promise, and his grateful heart would surely use the blessing for some noble end.

And on those visits home, Lois and the Doctor never failed to drive again up the leafy grade that led along

[illegible] till its dreamy magic [illegible] of Lucky Streak [illegible] at Lucky [illegible] between the [illegible] deep, with [illegible] pine woods [illegible] dome of heaven [illegible] the very deepest [illegible] always loved [illegible] showered the ground [illegible] when the sparkling [illegible] white patterns in the [illegible] where the sunshine [illegible] mellow through the [illegible] them that sacred day of [illegible] of their happy [illegible] Snowdrop seemed to [illegible] ways trotted [illegible] and the dreamy spell around them, and feared to break it with unseemly speed.

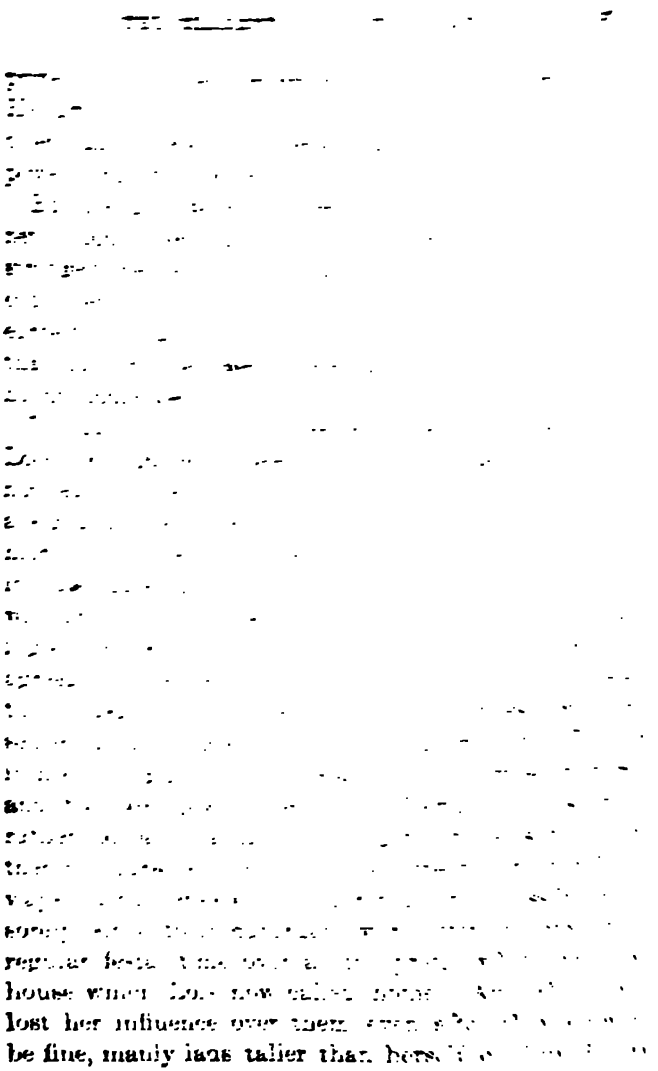
These peaceful drives always brought them to a pleasant destination. Just outside of the town of Lucky Streak, grown large and noisy with the lapse of time, and proud of its fine brick stores, its new hotel, and its slender church-spires pointing heavenward through the unthinned pine groves, was a pleasant home, where Edward Dennett and his young wife lived. All that wealth could purchase was combined to make that stately country-house a dwelling-place of elegance and comfort; and yet it possessed more, for in it breathed the charm and inspiration of a home

Mabel reigned a gentle queen over her happy household, while Mrs. Dennett and Aunt Willis looked on with motherly pride, and gave their advice to smooth out the rough places.

Edward Dennett had risen rapidly to the foremost rank in his county, and the old troubles which had once cast a cloud over his honored name almost faded out of memory.

Among the guests who sometimes visited that lovely mountain home was a slender woman with auburn hair and a fine white face. The years scarcely seemed to make any impression on her countenance; she was ever the same,—as willowy and sly as in her more charming girlhood. She still wrote her name Nellie Minton, adding with a low ripple of laughter to herself sometimes when she did it, that there was only one other name in the world better than that. Time had wrought one change in Nellie, — her scheming days were over. To be sure, she was deceitful and wilful still, and yet she had given up utterly — as defeated schemers usually do — all hope of attaining the one life object she had striven so desperately, by artful means, to attain. There was a calm indifference in the place of the old cunning watchfulness, only broken by an occasional revival of crafty delight in unfathoming some mystery her curiosity prompted her to explore.

Edward and Mabel felt a strange sympathy for her lonely hopelessness, and in various ways showed her little kindnesses, which, coming from the source they did, awakened all the friendship that dwelt in her narrow, selfish nature. Poor Nellie! her life was de-



girls assuming the airs and graces of young lady-hood.

And what mattered it if Lady Snowdrop was slow,—if she grew lazier and more independent as well as older every day? Did not they who rode behind her then have a longer hour to spend together on their drive,—an hour which held so much of bliss for both their hearts? Naught could make them wish to have it changed, since often when this very fault made them late on their return, and the gathering evening shades found them still upon the road, the balmy freshness, the quiet charm, that stole around them, recalled something of the beauty of those first drives they had taken in the early spring-time of their love, and brought back its modest, tender inspiration, like the dewy fragrance of the April blossom amid the summer's ripe, delicious harvest.

Every feature of those old scenes had a meaning for Lois and the Doctor: under those solitary oaks Lady Snowdrop used to stop and fall asleep in the drowsy shade, while the Doctor watched the birds, and looked out over the rolling hills, yellow with the summer's ripened crown, through the meshes of a dream which strained all evil and unrest out of the charmed life he led; over on that slope when the spring's green young grasses matted the earth with soft and fragrant folds of nature's velvets, they used to stop to watch the sunlight flash in diamonds, crystal and purple and bright red, from every trembling dewy spear; here they could see more clearly than elsewhere that low blue line of peaks along the far horizon's rim; and there they had always stopped to get a spray of drooping creamy blossoms from the overhanging locust-trees.

Ah, those long, quiet [redacted] to heart and [redacted] tender, haunting [redacted] far-off harmonies of the [redacted] bars of perfect song! [redacted] the little gig and Lucy [redacted] together. And yet [redacted] but growing dearer. [redacted] decay the sacred objects [redacted] halo of glory as impenetrable [redacted]

Lois grew to think the big tall [redacted] Doctor never used, and when she [redacted] like a fishing-rod angling [redacted] bees or humming-birds. — she actually came to think it looked far better than those [redacted] with tasselled ends, that graced the stylish turnouts of the time.

Nor was she ashamed that the Doctor always wore his yellow gloves. She did not grow so accustomed to the sight of them that she forgot that they were odd; but she was even glad of the fact. A depth of fondness in her heart welled over every time she saw them, for they seemed a token to her of the Doctor's innocent, unselfish character. And besides, she felt so penitent when she remembered how she once had laughed at them, that she felt all her tenderness could never make atonement for it.

And so, when sometimes the Doctor came home from town with a pair of new gloves, and carelessly tossing them into her lap, would say, innocently, that the old ones were badly soiled, and he thought it about time to replace them, so would she see if these

were as good as the old, quite unconscious that he had done or said anything unusual, or that she was smiling to keep the tears of love from overflowing, she always touched them reverently, and said softly to herself, "The dear old soul! I love them better every time he brings them." And she even kissed them sometimes when the Doctor was not around, as if to give them a benediction from her love.

The Doctor scarcely appeared to grow much older; he became a trifle stouter with advancing years, perhaps a shade more florid; but his eyes were clear and steady, and his manner so much more jovial and cheerful than of old, that the added silver to his glossy hair seemed more like the foreshadowings of a second youth's soft glories than the cold warning of a hastening old age. And truly life had just begun its best blessings for him. Why should he grow old, when youth's delights, which he had never known before, were all around him? His heart was in its summer, so let the long years of experience and sorrow fall away and be forgotten. The present was enough for him. "A man scarcely knows what he lacks — what he needs — in this world, until he has once found it," he would say. "It is strange how one prospers when he settles down in life. Everything tends to his advantage then. Perhaps because a little secure happiness sweetens every burden in the way; if not, then whatever else, it is strong enough to be recognized and felt; and we who have found that great advantage would not exchange it for anything else the world contains."

Ah! who can put a price upon it, — that sacred

thing which brings us nearer heaven? Can tongues or pens describe it? Can deep research explain it? Can sordid wealth purchase an iota of it? It tinges all life with its rosy halo; it strengthens the aspirations, it sweetens every sorrow, it deepens every joy. No one can feel it without being better; no one can let it truly enter his heart without letting in with it self-sacrifice and charity. Oh, holy Love! most divine, most powerful of the passions, a light from heaven to illuminate the soul, come to each lonely, unsatisfied heart on earth, and heal its sorrows with thy matchless riches, and the world will be a glorious place indeed!

Then will there be no more perversion of love's blessings; then they who sacrifice it to frivolities and vice, they who hold it lightly, they who know it not, will realize the dawning of the golden age of peace and charity,—the sweet millennium of the heart.



